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Employee Engagement Strategies to Improve Profitability in Retail

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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

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MEd, University of Arkansas, 1997

BA, University of Arkansas, 1994

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Retail business leaders can improve profitability when they implement employee engagement strategies. The purpose of this single case study was to explore employee engagement strategies retail leaders use to improve profitability. The population included 6 department leaders in a single retail organization in the southeastern United States. The conceptual framework included Kahn’s employee engagement theory. Using Yin’s 5-step data analysis process, data from semistructured interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed to gain employee engagement strategies that retail leaders use to improve profitability. Four major themes emerged that retail business leaders use to increase profitability: having daily staff interaction, hiring the right people for the job, creating a positive work environment, and having regular one-on-one interaction with every staff member. The implications for positive social change include a more engaged workforce, which could encourage business owners to reinvest profits and offer sustained employment to a workforce, which may contribute to the economic well-being of communities.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate my study to my loving parents who always instilled in me the value of faith in God, integrity, hard work, and education. To my loving mom, thank you for being my best friend, for teaching me attention to detail and organization. Even though you are no longer here, I remember every lesson you taught me about God, family, and work ethic. I hope to be a fraction of the woman you were. I love and miss you. To my amazing dad, you continue to give me strength and encouragement daily. You have always been the best example and complete embodiment of hard work. I love you and thank you for sharing your amazing spirit of determination with me.

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First, I would like to thank God for His guidance and protection during this process and for giving me the grace and the strength I needed to persevere. God made it all possible and I could not have completed this journey without strength and faith in Him.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The human resource research community has connected performance and engagement only approximately 20 years prior to the time of this study (Truss, Shantz, Soane, Alfes, & Delbridge, 2013). Better engagement results in higher performance. Thus, positive interactions render positive effects on engagement. Employees are more engaged when they receive positive feedback, more autonomy, and support (Menguc, Auh, Fisher, & Haddad, 2013). Finally, engagement yields other positive results for organizational strategies. One positive outcome is profitability (Townsend, Wilkinson, & Burgess, 2014). In this qualitative case study, I explored engagement strategies that some retail leaders use to improve profitability.

Background of the Problem

Employee engagement is a vast focus area; however, it remains underdeveloped in genre research (Shuck & Reio, 2011). Business practitioners look for answers to close the literary gap in scholarship, theory, and practice (Zhang, Avery, Bergsteiner, & More, 2014). Engagement is also related to other positive work environment factors such as transformational leadership as well as a positive work environment that enhance an employee’s ability to better do their job (Zhang et al., 2014). As a result, certain benefits are attached to creating an ideal work environment and engagement is key to that paradigm (Anitha, 2014; Shuck & Reio, 2014). Organizational benefits include better workplace climate, better employee well-being, and a more positive way in which employees interpret and experience their work (Shuck & Reio, 2014). Employee engagement is a conduit to various aspects of creating an environment conducive to employee productivity (Huang et al., 2016).

Although numerous research aspects exist for researching employee engagement, my focus in this study was exploring employee engagement strategies to improve productivity in retail. Business leaders in service companies have seriously studied engagement for the past 20 years (Kumar & Pansari, 2015). As a new concept, employee engagement was defined as only personal achievement (Kumar & Pansari, 2015). The concept has evolved through the years in the form of varying definitions. Kumar and Pansari (2015) stated that modern research and development on employee engagement was mostly a way to enhance engagement as a collective means for improving profitability and productivity. Furthermore, Purcell (2014) found a direct positive relationship between productivity and profitability.

Problem Statement

Retail business leaders struggle to maintain profitability because of disengaged employees (Salimath & Kavitha, 2015). Kumar and Pansari (2015) found that when a retail company increased employee engagement, profitability measured by earnings per share, increased as much as 132%. The general business problem that I addressed in this study is that some retail leaders struggle to maintain profitability with a disengaged workforce. The specific business problem that I addressed in this study was that some retail leaders lack employee engagement strategies to improve profitability.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore engagement strategies that some retail leaders use to improve profitability. The population consisted of six department leaders from a single retail organization in the southeastern United States who had successfully used employee engagement strategies to improve profitability. Highly engaged employees are more productive, which positively affects profitability (Asumeng, 2013). Society could benefit from an engaged workforce because engaged employees help increase organizational profitability. Profitable business leaders could reinvest earnings and increased employment opportunities, which may contribute to the economic well-being of citizens and the social change of communities.

Nature of the Study

Of the available research methods, I considered three research methods for this study. According to Yin (2017), possible research methods include quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. Quantitative researchers collect numerical data and test hypotheses about the relationships and differences among variables (Healey, 2016). According to Lee and Krouss (2015), qualitative researchers use open-ended questions to explore the *why* and *how* of phenomenon. Researchers using the mixed-method approach include both quantitative and qualitative techniques for gathering data and testing hypotheses (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). I rejected the quantitative and mixed methods because I did not use numeric data to test a hypothesis about the relationship or differences among variables. The purpose of this study was to explore a phenomenon. I conducted in-depth interviews to explore strategies for employee engagement to improve profitability. Thus, the qualitative method was more appropriate to address my research question.

Of the qualitative research designs available, I considered phenomenology, ethnography, and case study. Researchers use phenomenology to explore the meanings of participants' lived experiences (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015). Researchers use ethnography to explore a group culture (Baskerville & Myers, 2015). Because my goal was not to explore lived experiences or group culture, I rejected both these qualitative designs. A case study is most appropriate when the researcher wants to explore a bounded system using multiple types of data sources (Gill, 2014). I explored employee engagement strategies in a single retail company, thus a single case study was the appropriate design for my research.

Research Question

What employee engagement strategies do retail leaders use to improve profitability?

Interview Questions

1. What employee engagement strategies do you use to improve profitability?
2. How did you implement these employee engagement strategies?
3. Why do you think your strategies were successful?
4. What employee engagement strategies do you use to identify the difference between engaged employees versus disengaged employees?
5. What employee engagement strategies do you use to increase engagement among those who are disengaged once identified?

6. What strategies will you use for ongoing improvements for increasing employee engagement to improve profitability?
7. What additional information can you share regarding strategies to keep employees highly engaged?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was Kahn’s 1990 employee engagement theory (EET). According to Kahn (1990), employees engaged in work activities based on three tenets: emotion, cognition, and physical. Emotionally engaged employees experience high levels of well-being (Kahn, 1990). Kumar and Pansari (2015) asserted that cognitively engaged employees consider work as meaningful. Physically engaged employees show higher levels of productivity and less turnover (Kumar & Pansari, 2015). An employee can experience the engagement tenets individually or all at once; however, physical engagement involves both emotional and cognitive engagement (Shuck & Reio, 2014).

Employee engagement is harnessing employees in their work roles while expressing themselves cognitively, emotionally, and physically (Cheema et al., 2015). For an individual to experience full self-harnessing into their work role, he or she must have optimal working conditions (Kahn, 1990). Furthermore, Kahn (1990) explained that employers have the responsibility to provide employees with adequate resources if they expect to maintain employee engagement. Kahn’s engagement theory is in alignment with this study because employers can affect employee engagement. I explored these strategies.

Operational Definitions

Employee engagement: Employee engagement is an individual's ability to commit various degrees of themselves into a work environment via emotional, cognitive, or physical behavior (Kahn, 1990).

Personal engagement: Personal engagement is when an individual simultaneously expresses their "preferred selves" via task behaviors and expression. This includes emotional, cognitive, and physical behavior (Kahn, 1990, p. 700).

Personal disengagement: Personal disengagement occurs when an individual simultaneously withdraws their connection from others and task activities via emotional, cognitive, and physical behavior (Kahn, 1990).

Emotional engagement: Emotional engagement is a bond toward one's knowledge, belief, and pride in the job (Shuck & Reio, 2011).

Cognitive engagement: Cognitive engagement is a personal appraisal of one's safe and meaningful work environment (Shuck & Reio, 2011).

Physical engagement: Physical engagement includes behavioral or physical actions a worker takes in their job. Physical engagement also encompasses the emotional and cognitive aspects (Shuck & Reio, 2011).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions, limitations, and delimitations affect data analysis and validity of research projects (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Researchers should identify assumptions, limitations, and delimitations to gain a solid understanding of the scope of the study

(Milbourn, McNamara, & Buchannan, 2014). In this section, I outlined the three elements of assumptions, limitations, and delimitations.

Assumptions

Assumptions are elements of the study that researchers believe to be true but not proven (Milbourn et al., 2014). The first assumption was that the population of six to eight department leaders from a single retail organization in the southeastern United States would be sufficient for my study. The second assumption was that managers could develop employee engagement strategies that improve profitability. The final assumption was that participants would communicate honestly in a way that would contribute to the quality of my research study.

Limitations

Kaefer, Roper, and Sinha (2015) described limitations as elements of the study beyond their control. Consumer traffic flow on the sales floor makes the retail environment fluid and unpredictable. The first limitation was that I may not gain access to all leaders that might contribute to the study. The final limitation related to trending technologies that change the way customers and employees interact.

Delimitations

Delimitations are restrictions or constraints that the researcher imposes (Newman, Hitchcock, & Newman, 2015). First, the participant sample included only retail business leaders. Participant interviews took place only within a certain geographic area. Finally, the sample size included a single case study with a single organization. I might have learned more if I had chosen to conduct a multiple case study of organizations within the same industry.

Significance of the Study

Retail business leaders and society could benefit from the results of this study. First, retail business leaders may use study findings as a framework for creating strategies to keep employees highly engaged. Second, retail business leaders could benefit from highly engaged workers through increased profitability. Finally, society could benefit because profitable businesses are able to reinvest their earnings into the local community. Highly engaged employees are more productive, which positively affects profitability (Asumeng, 2013).

Contribution to Business Practice

Retail business leaders could use the results of this study to help develop a framework for better aligning employee functions to increase engagement. Retail business leaders may find this study valuable because retail leaders struggle with profitability because of a disengaged workforce (Asumeng, 2013). The implication to business practitioners is that employee engagement strategies could improve profitability.

Implications for Social Change

Society could benefit from the results of this study. As of 2016, the number of employees in the U.S. retail industry exceeded 15.7 million people (Farfan, 2016). Engaged employees are more productive and employable (Kumar & Pansari, 2015). In addition, engaged employees help increase organizational profitability (Purcell, 2014). When small retail businesses operate profitably, business owners could reinvest profits and offer sustained employment to a workforce, which may contribute to the economic well-being of communities.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

A formal literature review is a necessary critical appraisal of a study topic in academic writing. A well-written and researched literature review aids researchers in providing an evaluative and valuable contribution to their chosen field of study (Winchester & Salji, 2016). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore employee engagement strategies that improve profitability in retail stores. In this study, the review of academic and professional literature included prior research summaries as well as comparisons and contrasts of study findings and methods.

Research databases included ProQuest, EBSCOhost Primary, Business Source Complete, ABI/INFORM Complete, SAGE, and the Walden University Library. I used a total of 205 references in my doctoral study proposal to ensure scholarly depth and rigor. Of those reference sources, 87% were peer-reviewed journal articles published within 5 years of the publication date of this academic study from 2014 to 2018. I used a total of 75 references in the literature review. Of those references, at least 85% were published within 5 years of the publication date of this academic study from 2014 to 2018. Review citations included peer-reviewed articles, journals, and books. Also included are some seminal peer-reviewed articles, journals, and books published since 1979.

In the first section, I explained how EET is the foundation for understanding the importance of implementing employee engagement strategies to increase profitability in retail organizations (Kahn, 1990). I also explained how Kahn’s (1990) research includes a description on the difficulty of influencing personal employee engagement and how vital it is to organizational success. The next section is a description of the major tenets of EET followed by specific descriptions of those components. The final sections of the review include a discussion of an alternative theory as well as information on research conducted on antecedents to productivity and profitability.

Employee Engagement Theory

Slack, Corlett, and Morris (2015) described engagement as an antecedent to productivity strategies within organizations. Work environment and job satisfaction are directly related to engagement and productivity (Fu & Deshpande, 2014). Kahn gave EET significant origin (Dagher, Chapa, & Junaid, 2015). Kahn also was the first to offer a theoretical contribution about engagement almost 30 years ago; and there has been relative silence about researching engagement until the last few years or the time of this study (Saks & Gruman, 2014). At the time of this study, Kahn had been cited almost 2000 times on engagement theory; however, most citations have been within the last 5 years (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Thus, engagement literature and research has remained new (Saks & Gruman, 2014).

Kahn (1990) defined *engagement* as diverse employee expression on emotional, cognitive, or behavioral levels. In addition to expressing themselves on either of the three levels, employees could display ranges and rigor within the three levels. Engagement occurs when workers willfully extend personal resources and harness themselves to their work roles (Kahn, 1990). The engagement process entails individuals expressing and employing themselves cognitively, emotionally, or physically during actual work activities (Alvi, Haider, Haneef, & Ahmed, 2014).

Kumar and Pansari (2015) stated that while expressing oneself in work activities, employee engagement is important to productivity and profitability in retail organizations. Kahn (1990) offered an engagement theory based on personal work roles. Personal engagement in a work role is an employee’s preferred self as pertains to (a) emotional connection to others, (b) cognition or personal presence or (c) work task or physical behaviors. In the workplace, people display various degrees of personal engagement or disengagement based on either of the three attributes: cognitive, emotional, or physical contribution. According to Rothmann and Baumann (2014), displaying these three attributes meant individuals were cognitively alert, emotionally attached, and physically involved.

Anitha (2014) added that when employees applied all three attributes, they are productive in a positive way. AbuKhalifeh and Som (2013) also gave several ways to inspire productivity via engagement including development, communication, recognition, and reward; however, leadership remained the most impactful productivity tool. Leaders inspire the most positive productivity (Lin & Hsiao, 2014). Therefore, Rana, Ardichvili, and Tkachenko (2014) explained the importance of leaders encouraging engagement while fostering a conducive work environment and minimizing tensions that might affect the three attributes: physical, emotional, or cognitive engagement.

General employee experiences influenced personal engagement or disengagement (Kahn, 1990). Kahn (1990) used two qualitative studies to generate a descriptive theory displaying this notion. Kahn also specifically focused on the various degrees in which people chose to assert or remove themselves into a work role-hence engagement or disengagement. In those studies, individuals engaged and disengaged on a consistent basis (Dagher et al., 2015). Workers used engagement or disengagement as a defense mechanism or form of expression (He, Zhu, & Zheng, 2014). When they disengaged, they were on the defense. When they engaged, they were choosing to express themselves. Expression was the favorable posture (He et al., 2014).

Expression or personal engagement was how individuals viewed their work, themselves, and the relationship between the two (Kahn, 1990). Kahn (1990) sought a theoretical framework that might serve as a tool for practitioners to understand personal expression in work roles or self-in-role. Individuals can express work roles or personal engagement by inserting or removing themselves in various degrees. Expression is harnessing oneself into a work role (Jose & Mampilly, 2015).

For an individual to experience full self-harnessing into his or her work role, he or she must have optimal working conditions (Kahn, 1990). Work conditions determine the extent to which individuals express more or less of themselves in job roles (Kahn, 1990). Workers exhibit personal energy or drive via emotional, cognitive, or physical engagement (Kahn, 1990). By Kahn’s (1990) account, an individual is personally engaged when he or she acts and expresses his or her best self within a work role without sacrificing either of the three conditions in a conducive work environment. Personal disengagement is when an individual is detached from his or her work role (Valentin, Valentin, & Nafukho, 2015).

Furthermore, personal engagement or disengagement is not only a function of work environment, but it is also attached to need satisfaction (Valentin et al., 2015). Building on Kahn's theory, Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, and Bakker (2002) stated that employee engagement was a fulfilling and positive state of mind toward work-related tasks characterized by an individual's need for dedication, vigor, and absorption. When workers *fail* to experience such a positive state of mind and their needs are not met, they may choose to personally disengage (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015).

To the contrary, leaders and practitioners desire the opposite effect, engagement (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). Kahn (1990) explained that engagement theory was previously used to map general workers' experiences with hopes of influencing degrees of personal engagement. Practitioners have yet to garner consensus when defining employee engagement; however, the idea is still a keystone business concept (Shuck & Reio, 2011), and leaders often use it as an employee performance optimization tool. However, little research investigates employee roles relating to engagement (Yadav & Katiyar, 2017).

Optimal performance via engagement is integral to organizational goals. Not only is disengagement counter to organizational strategy, but it is counter to knowledge sharing and teamwork (Saunders & Tiwari, 2014). Knowledge sharing disengagement is failing to share knowledge as well as lacking the motivation to do so (Lin & Hsiao, 2014). Furthermore, knowledge sharing disengagement is a state of nonparticipation where team members are silent and withdrawn. Knowledge sharing disengagement is a pressing concern for organizations (Ford, Myrden, & Jones, 2015). Ford et al. (2015) described failing to share knowledge as incompetent passivity.

With a growing desire to make employees more competent and productive, the employee engagement topic is becoming more and more popular (Hargrove et al., 2015). In the last decade before the time of this study, dozens of meta analyses and employee engagement information has surfaced (Correa & Larrinaga, 2015; see also Egan, 2014; Lodhia & Jacobs, 2013).

Despite the attention and research, concerns remain regarding measure, meaning, and theory (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Shuck and Reio (2011) explored the current state of research as well as possible literary gaps or research opportunities. Regardless of some attention and research, there is a lack of consensus regarding employee engagement (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). Alagaraja and Shuck (2015) further questioned the validity of engagement's most popular measure, mental presence. Furthermore, the full extent of engagement involves cognitive availability, which leads to emotional investment, which may be translated to physical behavior (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). Kahn (1990) most viably expressed the three attributes with EET.

Employee Engagement Tenets

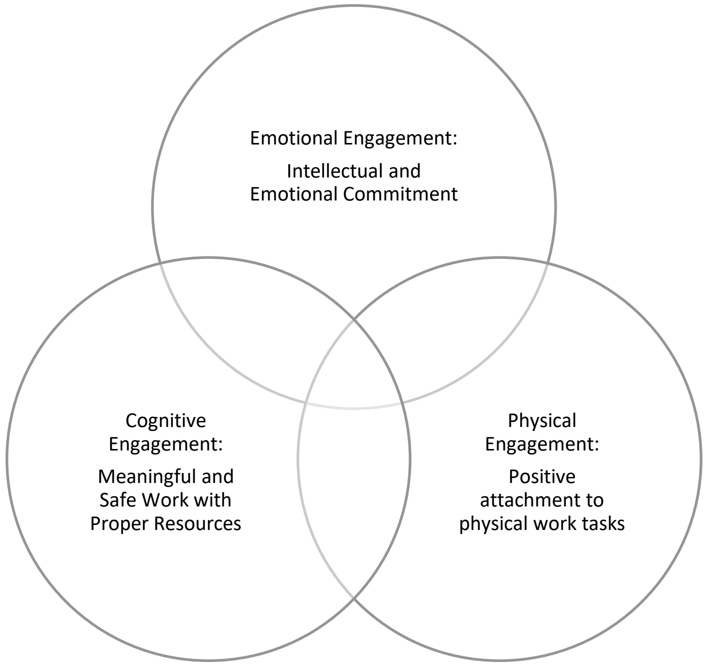

Figure 1. There are three ways to express employee engagement: emotionally, cognitively, or physically (Kahn, 1990).

Theory history. In recent years before the time of this study, employee engagement was a popular human capital subject, but defining the concept has been problematic since early inception (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Despite some continual disagreement, confusion, and lack of consensus on the topic, engagement was necessary for higher employee commitment and positive work outcomes (Saunders & Tiwari, 2014; Sondheim et al., 2017). The reason there was so much disagreement was because of conceptual overlap (Saks & Gruman). Even with global attention, there was still a need for extensive research because a confusing conceptual overlap existed between engagement, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and job involvement (Saks & Gruman, 2014).

Alvi et al. (2014) explained the search for finding a discernable distinctive construct that transcends rearranged phrases including job involvement, job satisfaction, job commitment, empowerment, and flow. Despite notable differences among those topics, Alagaraja and Shuck (2014) found some links. Engagement between workers, job alignment, and organizational commitment was all conducive to organizational strategic achievement (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015).

Regardless of literary overlap between the terms engagement and organizational citizenship behavior, job involvement, and organizational commitment, Jose and Mampilly (2015) found significance in employee engagement as a singular construct. The concepts are different. Organizational citizenship was responsible work behavior associated with formal reward (Jose & Mampilly, 2015). Organizational commitment was attachment and attitude towards an organization (Jose & Mampilly, 2015). Finally, engagement was an individual’s level of absorption and attentiveness toward his or her work (Jose & Mampilly, 2015). According to Kahn (1990), the work engagement construct involved harnessing oneself into a work role cognitively, emotionally, or physically.

Kahn (1990) researched and worked for 25 years to build a viable theory on employee engagement. Kahn’s work has been on the forefront of practitioners and academicians as a leading source for engagement theory since 1990. In recent years, as of the time of this study, the engagement construct has been considered an elemental improvement tool in many organizations. As a result, human resource analysts have continued to work toward developing strategies to foster an engagement environment (Cheema, Adram, & Javed, 2015).

Kahn (1990) concluded that workers desire meaningfulness at work and will use personal discretionary efforts in the right conditions and outcomes. Inside organizations where leaders value engagement, those leaders seek retention and now view engagement as a viable means to those positive outcomes (Radda, Majidadi, & Akanno, 2015). Employee engagement is harnessing employees in their work roles while allowing them to express themselves cognitively, emotionally, and physically (Cheema et al., 2015).

Cognitive engagement. Alagaraja and Shuck (2015) defined *cognitive engagement* as the most rational level and the first engagement dimension. This level is where employees develop context and work perspective. Employees become mentally aware of their work environment. Being cognitively engaged means work is safe, meaningful, and properly resourced (Algaraia & Shuck, 2015). Properly resourced means command of and access to proper resources (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015).

Purcell (2014) defined *cognitive engagement* as a worker's psychological state of mind while at work. The cognitive process is when the individual assigns value on a present situation via unique interpretations of space and time. According to Alagaraja and Shuck (2015), cognitively engaged team members own a shared purpose with their work organization. These employees understand the shared purpose and are willing to make personal sacrifice and investment to preserve it (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015).

Cognitive engagement is complete focus and emersion into one's work. People who experience deep cognitive engagement have difficulty disconnecting from work at the end of the day (Rothmann & Baumann, 2014). For employees to have experienced cognitive engagement, they need to have had certain conditions. Those conditions exist within a desired psychological work climate (Lee & Ok, 2015).

Lee and Ok (2015) evaluated whether organizational work environment perception as well as self-perception as engagement predictors. Incorporating Kahn's three psychological conditions as theoretical framework, Lee and Ok collected data from 394 hotel managers and frontline employees. After conducting a hierarchical multiple regression analysis, results revealed that four components of psychological climate along with self-evaluations were positively related to employee engagement. Those four psychological components included managerial support for service, customer orientation of the management, information-sharing communication, and internal service (Lee & Ok, 2015).

Furthermore, employees in higher engagement environments tended to experience personal accomplishment and psychological well-being. Psychological empowerment and perceived supervisor support positively influenced employee engagement (Truss et al., 2013). Workers felt more secure when their job role was meaningful in the right psychological climate. When workers experienced the right psychological climate, they experienced cognitive work engagement (Lee & Ok, 2015). Cognitive engagement occurred when an individual had intense focus absorption and freely resisted distractions (Alvi et al., 2014).

Hansen, Byrne, and Kiersch (2014) explained that engagement in a conducive climate included psychological availability, meaningfulness, and safety. Psychological availability was having enough emotional and physical resources to abate distraction. Meaningfulness, as relates to cognitive engagement, was value and a worthwhile feeling toward work (Hansen et al., 2014). Meaningfulness also meant that individuals felt well compensated for their roll (Mature, 2016). Reward created more meaningfulness and did not necessarily include only monetary compensation.

Finally, safety is trust (Hansen et al., 2014). Workers must also feel as though they can voice their interests and self-expression without negative consequence. Leaders play a vital role in creating such an environment (Hansen et al., 2014). According to Byrne and Kiersch (2014), when employees experienced a positive psychological climate, they became ready to make emotional commitment.

Emotional engagement. Emotional engagement is when an employee is willing to invest personal resources; however, the lack of leadership support can cause emotional exhaustion (Kemp, Kopp, & Kemp, 2013). Alagaraja and Shuck (2015) explained that emotional engagement constituted an employee's willingness to personally bond, cognitively engage, and share themselves for common organizational purpose. Emotional engagement occurred when employees identified, shared, and invested in organizational vision and mission. Employees were willing to emotionally identify with a project, goal, or task at the current moment of engagement (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015).

Emotional resources are tangible as well as intangible; however, such resources are almost always defined as a sense of intensity, focus, or urgency (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). For example, individuals investing discretionary knowledge toward a project or task were emotionally engaged (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015, p. 24). With intense determination and focus, emotionally engaged employees are organizationally aligned and highly productive (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). At this point, employees become emotionally attached to the organization (Rothmann & Baumann, 2014).

Rothmann and Baumann (2014) further defined *employee engagement* as emotional attachment. Emotional attachment is an intellectual and emotional commitment to an organization (Unal & Turgut, 2015). Emotional engagement is also engaging effectively based on one's moods and emotions (Kassa & Raju, 2015). Furthermore, emotional engagement is a return on investment for work meaningfulness. Rothmann and Baumann called emotional engagement a strong work involvement. At this stage, individuals experience self-importance, a sense of worth, and welcome challenge in their work roles (Rothmann & Baumann, 2014). As a result, cognitive and emotional engagement translates to physical engagement (Kahn, 1990).

Physical engagement. In Kahn's study, cognitive and emotive forces preceded task or physical engagement. As a result, a worker had to be cognitively and emotionally engaged to become physically engaged (Kahn, 1990). Physical engagement was the result of positive cognitive and emotional attachment to one's work role. Rothmann and Baumann (2014) described *physical engagement* as an individual's willingness to contribute personal cognitive and emotive resources.

For example, workers could express physical engagement anywhere from *lazy* to *very vigorous involvement* (Alvi et al., 2014). Physical engagement meant that a worker had mental flexibility and high levels of energy while working. Physically engaged employees would also express a willingness to exert extra effort to accomplish difficult tasks (Rothmann & Baumann, 2014). Physical engagement was a reaction to positive cognitive and emotional assessments (Alagarja & Shuck, 2015).

Behavioral or physical engagement is intentional organizational alignment (Alagarja & Shuck, 2015; Kim & Schachter, 2015; Star, Russ-Eft, Braverman, & Levine, 2016). Physical engagement is the willingness to expend personal resources toward the organizational mission (Alagarja & Shuck, 2015). Some practitioners confuse physicality as the single form of engagement; however, physical engagement is a manifestation of cognitive and emotive engagement in behavioral form. All three forms of engagement aid leaders in creating organizational strategic alignment (Alagarja & Shuck, 2015).

Alternative Theories

There has been multiple theorist since Kahn; however, those theories have been more difficult to discern and less broadly accepted outside of Kahn's offering (Valentin et al., 2015). One of the most significant offerings is self-determination theory (SDT). Within SDT, engagement is autonomous as well as organizational motivation. Engagement is the result of organizations using a motivating factor or antecedent (Valentin et al., 2015).

For example, Valentin et al. (2015) described corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a motivator or an antecedent. CSR is sustainability, and engagement is crucial to the sustainability process (Slack et al., 2015). Employee alignment is also a key ingredient in that process for creating a productive work environment (Handa & Gulati, 2014). A conducive work environment is another motivating factor for SDT. According to Brajer-Marczak (2014), engagement is a continuous strategic process in developing productive human capital. That continuous process includes a strategic cycle: job alignment leading to employee engagement leading to a conducive work environment leading to organizational productivity.

Further adding to SDT, engagement is related to other motivators or antecedents such as security factors that enhance an employee's ability to do a better job. There are certain benefits attached to creating an ideal work environment and engagement is key to that paradigm (Huang et al., 2016). Employee engagement is connected to various aspects of creating an environment conducive to productivity. Some of those aspects might include: lowering turnover rates, enhancing job satisfaction, and increasing work safety (Huang et al., 2016).

Valentin et al. (2015) explained other theories. One explanation offered engagement as high levels of pleasure and activation; however, this explanation is unfortunately associated with burn-out antithesis which is less organically inspired (Valentin et al., 2015). Valentin et al. further defined engagement as a personal sense of focused energy and purpose that is evident to coworkers as supreme effort, adaptability, personal initiative, and persistence towards organizational commitment and goals which is more multidimensional. Unlike engagement as focused energy towards organizational goals and commitment, Valentin et al. (2015) also described engagement as high association and enthusiasm specifically geared towards personal vs an organizational focus. Finally, defining engagement should be a *clear delineation* between *stating* the construct apart from the *drivers* of that construct (Valentin et al., 2015).

Delineating the construct apart from the drivers is why I chose Kahn’s theory as the basis for my study. Despite the lack of consensus, Kahn’s theory appears more broadly accepted among practitioners (Dagher et al., 2015). Kahn (1990) defined engagement as something that happens within the individual cognitively, emotionally, and physically. Job satisfaction, strategic alignment, and organizational commitment exist outside the construct as drivers or residual benefits (Kahn, 1990).

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is a relatively new human capital concept, and there is yet to be consensus among practitioners on foundational theory (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Practitioners expect that business leaders can employ engagement ideals to cope with turbulent and uncertain industry conditions; however, leaders must also incorporate engagement into organizational policy and alignment and define it according to research need (Alagaraja & Githens, 2016; Kaliannan & Adjovu, 2015; Oswick, 2015). Despite evolving paradigms among practitioners, academia is still in search of antecedents and strategies that might lead to higher employee engagement (Oswick, 2015). Although there is increased interest in the construct, employee engagement is a broad phenomenon that is still poorly understood. Because it is still so poorly understood, Oswick (2015) implored Human Resource Development (HRD) practitioners to devote research and discussion to its implications in hopes that practitioners would develop more useful strategies. Oswick (2015) included three goals in the HRD research paradigm: provide commentary on topic deployment and emergence; introduce topic research; and provide utility, value, and future contribution to increasing strategies for engagement.

Furthermore, Oswick (2015) compiled a list of articles on engagement. Oswick's study implications were that HRD practitioners would be well served investing in leadership strategies that seem to increase engagement. Some considerations of the study included leadership style, organizational strategy and systems, strategic interface, and organizational culture (Oswick, 2015). Oswick (2015) further explained a lack of understanding of whether employee engagement (EE) is a permanent or a transitioning phenomenon; however, such answers might become more apparent with future research.

Engagement strategies. Company performance is dependent upon employee loyalty and commitment (Ibrahim & Falasi, 2014). Engagement is loyalty. Ibrahim and Falasi (2014) described a significant relationship between engagement and loyalty. The most significant relationship is affective continuance (Ibrahim & Falasi, 2014). Companies must be able to weather business challenges (Ibrahim & Falasi, 2014). Engaged teams perform better (Ibrahim & Falasi, 2014). That is where affective continuance comes in. Engagement increases when employees improve their on-the-job behavior; however, loyalty requires reciprocity and that is why it is important that leaders understand engagement strategy to create loyalty as well as organizational continuity (Ibrahim & Falasi, 2014)

Furthermore, effective engagement strategy equals competitive advantage (Bedarkar & Padita, 2014; Shuck, Twyford, Reio, & Shuck, 2014). Jauhari, Sehgal, and Sehgal (2013) conducted a case study on engagement and talent management. Results showed that incorporating both into human resource strategy translates to competitive advantage. Changing the business environment aids in managing people. It provides a foundation for engagement strategies and how business leaders can create competitive advantage.

Understanding engagement drivers is key in implementing organizational success strategy. This understanding will also enable company leaders to create an engagement culture to attract and retain the best employees who represent the best job fit and company strategy (Singh, 2016). Some engagement driving strategies include: creativity, employee empowerment, flexible welfare policies, job satisfaction, servant leadership, career growth opportunity, and procedural justice (Singh, 2016). These strategies are drivers or antecedents to employee engagement (Singh, 2016).

Antecedents of employee engagement. Employees require certain psychological conditions that inspire engagement and commitment. Employing the right engagement strategies enables employers to create the right working conditions (Lee, 2015). According to Cohen (2014), who is an executive vice president of Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), this is essentially true. In 2013, SHRM representatives conducted a study on antecedents of job satisfaction and engagement. Results showed that some antecedents included good relationships with coworkers and supervisors, organizational financial stability, and sufficient compensation.

An antecedent to increased engagement, is a positive work culture (Alagaria & Shuck, 2015; Fu & Deshpande, 2014). Positive work culture occurs when a worker experiences psychological agreement between organizational and individual goals. Alagarja and Shuck (2015) called this process working cohesively towards the same organizational goals. Organizational alignment paired with a sense of engagement enables workers to both execute as well as *experience* common strategic goals (Alagaria & Shuck, 2015). Work experience or organizational culture is important in building employee engagement.

Another antecedent to engagement is leadership (Rana et al., 2014). Leaders foster engagement (Ibrahim & Falasi, 2014). Part of fostering engagement is providing a conducive work environment (Huang et al., 2016). Leaders set the tone (Barnes, Collier, & Robinson, 2014). A conducive work environment is safe, supportive, meaningful, and empowering. Conducive work environments include job designs that minimize *physical*, *emotional*, and *cognitive* tensions (Fu & Deshpande, 2014; Rana et al., 2014). Another implication for engagement antecedent is that leaders initiate a reciprocal norm where employees feel a higher level of organizational connectedness that inspires them to give back (Rana et al., 2014). Engagement is an individual as well as a collective approach which might include aligning social support and resources with individual employee needs (Rana et al., 2014).

Additionally, various other antecedents, outcomes, and moderators link employee engagement to a conducive work environment (Rana et al., 2014). According to Radda et al. (2015), nine organizational outcomes are important to many organizational strategic planners including: profitability, productivity, consumer loyalty, safety, employee retention, absenteeism, shrinkage, and quality. Individual characteristics and job demand serve as moderators to relationships between coworker and supervisor, job characteristics and job design, as well as job environment and employee engagement (Rana et al., 2014).

Furthermore, turnover intention, job performance, and organizational citizenship behavior are all related to engagement levels (Rana et al., 2014).

Finally, employee engagement is important to leaders who desire to create a more highly qualified workforce with reduced turnover (AbuKalifeh & Som, 2013). A more qualified workforce is a powerful antecedent to engagement. Less qualified workers perform at lower levels (AbuKalifeh & Som, 2013). Performance is directly related to absenteeism, turnover, and related issues (AbuKhalifeh & Som, 2013).

There is still a literary gap that exists for increasing productivity and loyalty; however, there are some identified existing antecedents such as the ones listed (AbuKhalifeh & Som, 2013). That list includes recognition and reward, development, and communication (AbuKhalifeh & Som, 2013). As indicated in this study, the most significant antecedent to engagement is development. Human capital development is key (AbuKhalifeh & Som, 2013).

Another impactful antecedent linked to engagement is leader emotional intelligence. High emotional intelligence plays a significant role in in mediating employee work engagement. De Clercq, Bouchenooghe, Raja, and Matsyborska (2014) conducted a study where 272 employees showed the role between supervisors and employees can have a negative affect when leaders have low emotional intelligence. The higher the emotional intelligence, the lower organizational deviance and the higher work engagement becomes (De Clercq, Bouchenooghe, Raja, & Matsyborska, 2014).

There is also a powerful link and positive relationship between effective leadership and emotional intelligence (De Clercq et al., 2014). As a result, such leaders inspire follower motivation resulting in enhanced organizational engagement (VaderPal, 2014). Emotional intelligence is a key driving force in effective leadership (VaderPal, 2014). Employees will engage in the right conditions (Ford et al., 2015). Emotionally intelligent leaders create better working conditions (VaderPal, 2014).

Not only is emotional intelligence effective in increasing engagement, it also signals leader capability (Ljungholm, 2014). Emotions do have positive and negative function in the workplace which has a direct bearing on work outcomes, such as engagement strategy (Ljungholm, 2014). A leader's emotional intelligence has positive associations on the entire workforce and its functionality (Lijungholm, 2014). Workplace functionality includes the work setting, worker efficacy and engagement, as well as the overall organizational impact (Ljungholm, 2014).

In addition to having leaders who create corporate environments conducive to engagement, it is also important to have leaders who are committed to CSR (Glavas, 2016). CSR is about sustainability (Glavas, 2016). Sustainability means organizational longevity (Ibrahim & Falasi, 2014). Organizational leaders task individuals with contributing to their sustainability commitment (Ibrahim & Falasi, 2014). The activity usually increases engagement (Glavas, 2016). Engaged employees bring their whole selves into their work activities and generally experience more job satisfaction (Purcell, 2014).

Job Satisfaction. Job satisfaction is a positive or pleasurable emotional state because of an individual's job experience (Cheema et al., 2015). Employee satisfaction is directly related to their emotional state of mind and commitment level (Cheema et al., 2015). Engagement begins psychologically (Kahn, 1990). When employees are more satisfied with their jobs, they tend to be more committed to the organization (Fu & Deshpande, 2014).

Organizational commitment is the extent to which an employee identifies with the work and organization (Fu & Deshpande, 2014). In an empirical study, Fu and Deshpande (2014) used structural equation modeling (SEM) to explore indirect and direct relationships among job satisfaction, caring job climate, job performance, and organizational commitment of almost 500 workers in an insurance company. Fu and Deshpande (2014) concluded that a caring job climate was more impactful to job performance, satisfaction, and organizational command.

Job satisfaction or strategic alignment is a collective as well as an individual approach (Rana et al., 2014). Enhanced work engagement also requires a conducive work environment (Rana et al., 2014). A conducive environment is safe, supportive, meaningful, and empowering. Ideal work environments minimize physical, emotional, and cognitive tensions (Rana et al., 2014). Furthermore, more conducive work environments would allow workers to craft job alignment that allows them to increase supportive resources while decreasing hindrances (Tims, Derks, & Bakker, 2016). Despite job alignment being a competency-based approach, a research gap still exists that might provide practitioners with a comprehensive strategic approach to increased employee engagement via job satisfaction (Audenaert, Vanderstraeten, Buyens, & Desmidt, 2014).

Human resource management (HRM) is competency-based; however, this approach does not insure positive outcomes (Audenaert et al., 2014). As a result, HR practitioners look to the academic community for applied knowledge (Audenaert et al., 2014). To that end, there is a call to action for examining existing research evidence. Effective competency-based HRM is dependent upon diverse policy in strategic alignment (Audenaert et al., 2014).

Some specific job alignment activities include: language alignment, strategy interest, and behavior to increase employee job satisfaction and engagement (Audenaert et al., 2014). Audenaert, Vanderstraeten, Buyens, and Desmidt (2014) shared three engagement alignment paradigms. First, language alignment includes leaders explaining expectation and competency so that employees understand job requirements. A second alignment is strategy interest. Interest alignment references future direction and strategic aspiration. The final aspect is individual behavior. All three alignment paradigms are useful in supporting the idea that personal alignment does increase employee engagement and that it does warrant further research exploration (Audenaert et al., 2014).

Application of Engagement in Organizational Success

Engagement is important to organizational success (Rothmann & Baumann, 2014). Yet, only 13% of the worldwide workforce are engaged (Glavas, 2016). Engaged employees exhibit less absenteeism, provide better customer service, and are more profitable and productive (Jose & Mampilly, 2015). Engagement is an effective human capital tool. It is positively related to organizational productivity strategies including: performance, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction (Jose & Mampilly, 2015).

It also translates to human capital energy and involvement (Rothmann & Baumann, 2014).

Engagement holds strategic relevance and has become a highly important phenomenon in management literature and progressive organizations (Kahn, 1990). Kahn (1990) more clearly articulated engagement for practitioners and researchers alike. Employees desire a meaningful work experience and employers want to reduce production loss and turnover, which are both very expensive and detrimental to the bottom line (Radda et al., 2015). Thus, more positive organizational outcomes are linked to employee engagement (Hargrove et al., 2015).

Organizational alignment is a key construct to increasing employee engagement. Organizations face clear negative performance consequences without proper alignment and engagement (Algaraja & Shuck, 2015). Alignment means people are in the right place experiencing some level of engagement (Alvies et al., 2014). When employees *exhaust* emotional and physical capacities, they may experience job insecurity. Thus, they may start to disengage (Alvies et al., 2014). Engagement is the connection between individuals, work roles, and the organization. Workers express engagement emotionally, cognitively, and physically (Alvies et al., 2014). Workers connect to the organizational strategic plan when they engage in all three capacities (Alvies et al., 2014).

Organizational employee engagement is strategically relevant (Radda et al., 2015). When fully displayed, physically engaged employees align organizational goals with their own (Alagaria & Shuck, 2015). This internalization process aids in advancing organizational goals and strategy (Alagaria & Shuck, 2015). Engaged employees work harder, have less job-related accidents, turnover less, and experience a great since of well-being and productivity at work (Alagarja & Shuck, 2015).

Engagement and productivity. Engagement is a business challenge (Glavas, 2016). As of 2016, 87% of the worldwide workforce was unengaged (Glavas, 2016). In the United States alone, the economy currently loses as much as $550 billion annually in productivity because of disengaged workers (Glavas, 2016). As evidence of a broader social concern, workers are spending more and more time at work, making productivity even more imperative (Glavas, 2016). Organizational leaders strive for competitiveness making productivity even more essential (Griffin, Bryant, & Koerber (2015).

Because of the need for organizational competitiveness and productivity, engagement is a related factor (Shahid & Azhar, 2013). The corporate work environment must be conducive for engagement, and part of creating a conducive environment is employee well-being and emotional connection (Nasomboon, 2014). Surprisingly, work is not among the top reasons for personal well-being; however, employees tend to be more engaged with shared commitment alongside the organization (Glavas, 2016). Emotionally connected employees are more committed and engaged, hence more productive (Kemp et al., 2013). Additionally, Glavas (2016) explained the importance of organizational leaders understanding engagement drivers to increase productivity.

Contemporary human resource theory has been typically based on enhancing performance outcomes (Truss et al., 2013). Only most recently has research connected performance, productivity and engagement (Saks & Gruman, 2014). As a result, practitioners might apply such knowledge to organizational as well as individual goals

(Shahid & Azhar, 2013). Despite positive association with organizational strategy, the engagement concept is highly contested, scrutinized, and inconsistent; hence, the need for more research on engagement and the connection to productivity (Truss et al., 2013).

Recently, more and more research has emerged concerning engagement and employee productivity (Saks & Gruman, 2014). For example, Menguc et al. (2013) used the Job Demand-Resource (JD-R) model to explore engagement consequences and antecedents for service employees. Effects of support, feedback, and autonomy were examined because end user results affected engagement and productivity. Productivity was linked to engagement (Menguc et al., 2013). Menguc et al. concluded that positive interactions with supervisors rendered positive effects on engagement. Employees expressed more engagement when they received positive feedback and more autonomy which they translated to customers as productive outcomes (Menguc et al., 2013).

Another example of engagement productivity is employee retention (Radda et al., 2015). Engagement is linked to positive organizational outcomes and productivity (Kickert, 2014; Radda et al., 2015). Healthy employee retention is a positive outcome and translates to productivity and growth (Radda et al., 2015). A final example of positive organizational outcomes connected to engagement productivity is organizational policy and strategic communication (Cloutier, Felusiak, Hill, & Pemberton-Jones, 2015). Engagement should be incorporated into an organization’s policies. When engagement is part of policy, leadership can also make it part of the operational and strategic communication method (Cloutier et al., 2015). Engaged employees experience a higher sense of well-being and are more productive (Shuck & Reio, 2013).

Furthermore, work engagement is a strong predictive to job satisfaction and performance and productivity (Barnes et al., 2014). It is helpful for firm leaders to establish policies and procedures as well as strategies that maximize engagement and productivity. Some of those procedures leading to positive outcomes include

- Training and communication;
- Trust and empowerment;
- Leadership; and
- Customer service (Barnes et al., 2014).

Individual employee productivity is a key part of collective organizational performance (Jha & Kumar, 2016). The state of the individual employee offers clues as to the organizational environment, culture, and success. Engaged employees are efficient and productive. Engagement is critical to organizational success (Jha & Kumar, 2016).

Engagement and profitability. Engagement also leads to another positive organizational outcome, profitability (Diestel, Wegge, & Schmidt, 2014). Initial engagement study has isolated employee engagement as a personal achievement (Kumar & Pansari, 2015). On the contrary, engagement is organizational achievement (Kahn, 1990). Business leaders as well as academicians seek ways to enhance engagement as a collective means for improving productivity as well as profitability (Kumar & Pansari, 2015).

Team engagement drives organizational success (Griffin et al., 2015). Higher engagement aids leaders in inspiring better performance and consumer loyalty (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Many factors influence engagement including respect, trust, leadership, and management styles (Strom, Sears, & Kelly, 2014). If leaders expect to enhance engagement, it is important for human resource departments to take the lead in evaluating, measuring, and designing affective competencies conducive to growing engagement (Strom et al., 2014). There is a direct relationship between engagement, job performance, satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Barnes et al., 2014) which leads to profitability (Mutnuru, 2016).

Review of Methodologies

The research method and design for this study was a single qualitative case study. A review of academic and professional literature supports the selected research method. The research design and method also align with Kahn (1990) who used qualitative case study for exploring similar phenomenon. This section includes details regarding methodology and design considerations in support of the literature. The review of professional literature includes qualitative study descriptions compared to quantitative methodology.

For this study, I chose qualitative research. I based this study on Kahn's theory of employee engagement. Kahn (1990) researched and worked on the topic for nearly 25 years conducting interviews and using observational techniques to gather data. Cheema et al. (2015) cited Kahn's methods to provide the first and most consistently retained academic definition for the employee engagement phenomenon. Thus, I found qualitative research most appropriate.

Qualitative study requires rigorous analogy, is a highly iterative process, and exploratory in nature (Saxena, 2017; Whiffin, Bailey, Ellis-Hill, & Jarrett, 2014). Yin

(2017) explained that a case study is most appropriate when the researcher wants to explore multiple types of data sources. I explored employee engagement strategies in a single retail company, thus a single qualitative case study was the most appropriate design for my research. Like Kahn’s research, most of the sources I used throughout this study were qualitative methodologies.

Engagement research is growing; however, what is considered engagement research is unsettled (Correa & Larrinaga, 2015). Correa and Larrinaga (2015) found that there were three issues with choosing methodology: specificity in engagement research, lack of locus accepted by organizations, and more space for reflexivity on the topic. As a result, the need for engagement research existed; however, practitioners still search for a more conclusive definition (Yin, 2017). Furthermore, engagement research is often conducted via qualitative interview along with the use of a case study (Yin, 2017).

For example, Egan (2014) used a case study conducting interviews centering engagement on building individuals using document analysis. Bouten and Hoozee (2013) used case study analogy to look at strategies for leadership influence on engagement. Coffey (2013) used case study along with semistructured interviews to examine the need for strategic initiatives in building employee engagement. Lodhia and Jacobs (2013) used a case study to explore insight on how internal stakeholder engagement influences public practice. They also used interviews to document the analysis. Rodrigue, Magnan, and Boulianne (2013) used a case study along with semistructured interviews for analogy. Finally, Stubbs (2013) used semistructured interviews to evaluate if stakeholder pressure increases engagement. I used this information as a basis for selecting methodology appropriate for this study.

Alternatively, Dagher et al. (2015) conducted a quantitative study to showcase engagement history and its influence on self-efficacy. Dagher et al. explored three dimensions: dedication, vigor, and absorption. Also, Ben, Teo, and Martin (2015) used a mixed-methodology approach to explore human resource management practices and their impact on employee engagement. Ben et al. (2015) surveyed 675 workers in 16 semistructured interviews in two separate firms. Moreover, Ben et al. analyzed the survey data using path analysis and found that qualitative analogy supported their quantitative data.

Transition

In Section 1, I provided an introduction on how employee engagement affects employee productivity and organizational profitability. The review of professional literature included topics on EET applicable to my study, alternative theory information, engagement antecedents, and how it affects organizational success as well as individual job satisfaction. In the review, I also highlighted how employee engagement strategies are key in creating a work environment conducive to productivity and profitability in the retail industry. Highlighting the application of engagement in organizational success in the retail industry, I noted the need for leaders to create effective strategies that could lead to profitability. In the review of professional literature, I also provided a historical overview of employee engagement as well as how I arrived at building a qualitative study. In Section 2, I provided detail on the research methodology and design for my approach to the problem statement.

Section 2: The Project

The lack of engagement costs organizations $550 billion in lost revenue (Glavas, 2016). The purpose of this study was to explore engagement strategies. In Section 2, I included information regarding my use of a qualitative study on how business practitioners can use employee engagement as an effective human capital tool. This section includes the purpose statement, the role of the researcher, participants, research method and design, and population sampling. Other important headings include ethical research, data collection instrument and technique, data organization and analysis, and reliability and validity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore engagement strategies that some retail leaders use to improve profitability. The population consisted of six to eight department leaders from a single retail organization in the southeastern United States who have used engagement strategies to improve profitability. Asumeng (2013) examined that highly engaged employees were more productive, which positively affected profitability. Society could benefit from an engaged workforce because engaged employees help increase organizational profitability. Profitable business leaders could reinvest earnings and increased employment opportunities, which may contribute to the economic well-being of citizens and the social change of communities.

Role of the Researcher

A researcher's role in the data collection process is selecting the most efficient method and collecting and analyzing data that will address the research question

(Persohn, 2015). It is also a researcher's role to interpret and gather data in a way that clearly will demonstrate an understanding of the study phenomenon (Berger, 2015; Delyser & Sui, 2014). In qualitative research, a researcher's behavior and reporting can be beneficial in assisting the academic community with understanding complex interactions and mitigating bias (Elo et al., 2014). Furthermore, it is the qualitative researcher's responsibility to work to overcome constraints as well as ethical dilemmas that might affect research practices (Olin, Karl-Granlund, & Furu, 2016). As primary data collection instrument in this study, I made sure I was involved in every aspect of the process to ensure research quality.

Having experience and familiarity with a study topic aids in gaining more clarity in data collection (Berger, 2015; Bryman, 2015). When I was matriculating my master's degree, I worked for a major retail cosmetics line in Fayetteville, Arkansas. I have also served as a part-time seasonal sales associate in cosmetics in Orange County, California. As an entrepreneur, I sell my own cosmetic line in retail establishments across Southern California. Although I have contacts in the retail industry, I will choose participants with whom I have had no prior relationship. I have worked in various aspects of retail and have a strong understanding of the industry; however, I have not worked with employee engagement in any capacity within the retail industry.

To ensure participant protection, I followed the Belmont Report protocol. The Belmont Report is an outline used as a guide for having respect for participants and treating them ethically and judiciously (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979; Yin, 2017). The Belmont Report is a document stating ethical principles that each researcher should follow. The principles include justice, beneficence, respect of persons, and how to address any problems that might arise during research (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). Respect of persons means the researcher will treat all participants equally regardless of personal autonomy. Beneficence is minimizing harm and maximizing benefits on behalf of participants (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). Justice is fair benefit distribution and participant procedures (Nicolaides, 2016).

For this qualitative study, I interviewed participants for the data collection process. Robinson (2014) suggested avoiding any type of connection or affiliation with participants to mitigate personal bias. I have experience and background in the retail industry; however, I did not have a prior relationship, contact with, or exposure to participants. In addition, as the researcher, I treated each participant equally, attended to individual needs, maximized benefits, and did no harm to maintain integrity. The researcher should also work to make sure participants have adequate subject knowledge for their participation in the study (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1979). I made sure that I followed these guidelines in the Belmont Report.

The researcher is an important element in creating ethical qualitative research (Yin, 2017). To further mitigate bias, the researcher must be self-aware (Kidney & McDonald, 2014). This process is bracketing. Bracketing is self-awareness and putting aside personal views and bias (Yin, 2017). If researchers fail to put aside their personal views, they may affect the study outcome (Robinson, 2014). Oikonomidoy and Wiest (2015) explained that bracketing can be used as a means of suppressing personal viewpoints. I applied bracketing in this manner. Furthermore, bracketing is also an effective tool in mitigating bias in this way (Hammersley, 2013).

In addition to bracketing, the research setting should be a comfortable, available, and accessible environment that is private and free from interruption (McDermind, Peters, Jackson, & Daly, 2014). Selecting a conducive setting has an impactful effect on whether the researcher collects quality data (Schmidt, 2016). I conducted phone interviews. I made sure I was in a setting that was quiet and free of distraction. I made sure I did everything within my power to put the participant at ease during the interview. According to Schmidet (2016), participants feel more comfortable and provide more quality data when they are at ease and free from distraction.

Using a consistent interview protocol also aids in eliminating bias (Lee, 2014). I used a case study phone interview protocol during the data collection process (see Appendix A). According to Yin (2017), the interview protocol is an appropriate guide for increasing reliability as well as a consistent data collection procedure. It is the researcher’s responsibility to be nonjudgmental, attentive, and to create an atmosphere that is not emotional and free of distraction (Lee, 2014). A quality interview process is a useful qualitative data collection tool (DeLyser & Sui, 2014). Using such a protocol, the researcher should conduct interviews such that participants feel comfortable and are free to respond openly and honestly (Yin, 2017). Thus, I used an established interview protocol to ensure that I adequately organized the interview structure and maintained consistency with each participant (Appendix A).

Participants

Eligible participants for this study included department leaders from a single retail organization in the southeastern United States who have used engagement strategies to improve profitability. Participant time in retail and as a leader varied. According to Katz and Vinker (2014), participants should have knowledge of the research requirements in addition to a willingness to participate (Robinson, 2014). Also important was their personal view for the need for the study and how it might impact them (MacNeil, Foley, Quirk, & McCambridge, 2016). In qualitative case studies, researchers recruit participants who have experience in the study topic or phenomenon (Yap & Webber, 2015). Establishing participant criteria further validates the study as well as aids in more effective data collection (Yin, 2017).

Some strategies for gaining access to participants includes reviewing relevant literature (Rogers & Earnshaw, 2015). Professional contacts are also a way of gaining access to participants (Daniel, 2014). Thus, gaining direct access to participants means obtaining permission from gatekeepers that might include care coordinators, administrators, or department heads (Wood, Burke, Byrne, & Morrison, 2016; Gülmez, Sağtaş, & Kahyaoğlu, 2016). Gatekeepers also determine the decision-maker as well as participant availability within an organization (Gülmez et al., 2016). In order to achieve participant access, I introduced myself to the gatekeeper, explained the purpose of the study, and obtained a signed letter of cooperation. After I received institutional review board (IRB) approval, I worked with the gatekeeper to identify potential participants.

Once I identified potential participants and followed protocol for permission and access, I began establishing a working relationship. According to Kidney and McDonald (2014), gaining positive rapport with participants is key in collecting quality data and reaching data saturation. Also, building a working relationship with participants means sharing information. Participants feel more comfortable and open to share when the researcher appears flexible and provides maximum information about the study and their involvement (Drabble, Tocki, Salcedo, Walker, & Korcha, 2015). Participants are also more at ease if they feel as though their skills align with the overarching research question (Yin, 2017). I made sure participant characteristics aligned with the study. I continued to build a working relationship with considerate and appropriate communication throughout the process.

Research Method and Design

Of the available research methods, I considered three for this study: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method. It is important for researchers to choose the most appropriate method when conducting academic research (Venkatesh et al., 2013). The most appropriate research method for my study was qualitative case study. As I presented in Section 1, I expanded the Nature of the Study section to explain the approach. In this section, I shared my design details as well as the decision-making process for selecting a qualitative case study research method.

Research Method

To explore strategies retail leaders use to increase employee engagement, I selected the qualitative research method. Qualitative researchers collect data using multiple sources in a natural setting (Yin, 2017). Qualitative research is an important means of gaining appropriate access to participants, their motivation, and behaviors (Ahmed & Ahmed, 2014). Researchers use the qualitative method as a viable structure for obtaining answers to interviewing, observation, as well as specific research questions (Bristowe, Selman, & Murtagh, 2015). In my study, I interviewed retail leaders to explore engagement strategies they might use to improve profitability. Thus, the qualitative method was most appropriate for my study.

An alternative research method is the quantitative design. Quantitative research is primarily used to observe naturally occurring phenomenon with empirical evidence (Khan, 2014). Quantitative researchers test hypotheses and collect numerical data about the differences and relationships among variables (Healey, 2016). Such research requires empirical observation and testing mathematical representations (Parry, Mumford, Bower, & Watts, 2014). I rejected the quantitative method because I did not use numeric data to test a hypothesis about the relationship or differences among variables. The purpose of this study was to explore a phenomenon. Exploring a phenomenon is more typical of qualitative research (Cope, 2014).

Further, mixed-method research combines both qualitative as well as quantitative research (Yin, 2017). In addition, the mixed method is a typical approach for novel research (Fetters, 2016). I reviewed the mixed method but rejected it because I conducted in-depth interviews to explore strategies for employee engagement to improve profitability in retail.

Research Design

Selecting the appropriate research design includes collecting as well as analyzing data that best aids in explaining the research (Yazan, 2015). Also important is developing a research strategy (Sroka, Cygler, & Gajdzik, 2014). The qualitative case study design was most appropriate. Qualitative researchers use open-ended questions to explore the *why* and *how* of phenomena (Lee & Krauss, 2015). A qualitative research method is more appropriate for obtaining a better understanding of human experiences (Nelson, 2016). In this study, I explored the employment engagement strategies retail leaders use to improve profitability.

The qualitative case study is most appropriate when the researcher uses multiple data sources exploring a bounded system (Yin, 2017). Avoiding research bias is also important in the case study method (Yin, 2017). To avoid bias, a researcher must ensure quality data collection that adequately supports the research (Vohra, 2014). I chose the case study because I explored employee engagement strategies in a single retail company, thus a single case study was the most appropriate design for my research.

I also considered phenomenology or ethnography designs prior to selecting the qualitative case study design. Phenomenology is examining participants' lived experiences (Gill, 2014). Ethnography is exploring and understanding group culture to explain behavior (Jerolmack & Khan, 2014). I rejected both these designs because I did not explore group culture or lived experiences.

When considering the method and design, researchers should collect sufficient data to achieve data saturation (Moustakas, 1994). Researchers achieve data saturation when participant interviews or data collection no longer present new information (Noohi, Peyrovi, Goghary, & Kazemi, 2016). There is no standard number of interviews or participants (Guettermann, 2015); however, data saturation occurs when no new themes, information, or codes arise (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). I continued to interview participants until I achieved data saturation.

Population and Sampling

I selected the purposeful sampling technique. With purposive sampling, a researcher selects study participants based on their experience or knowledge (Lips-Wiersma & Mills, 2014). In the purposive approach, a researcher also relies on personal judgement to select participants who might best provide the information needed for the study topic (Palinkas et al., 2015). Daniel (2014) described purposeful sampling as a nonprobability technique, which is appropriate for qualitative study. With this technique, respondents can share expressive opinions, experiences, and common qualities (Suen, Huang, & Lee, 2014). I chose the criterion based purposive sampling technique. Criterion based sampling is using a sample meeting a certain criterion or skill sets required for research (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). This technique was appropriate because I explored employee engagement strategies of retail leaders in a single organization who have used engagement to improve profitability.

The population sample for this study included six department leaders from a single retail organization in the southeastern United States who have successfully used employee engagement strategies to improve profitability. I determined eligible participants via the letter of cooperation. Martino, Elvira, and Louzada (2017) advised researchers to select between 5 and 50 participants to ensure data saturation. Robinson (2014) suggested a sample size of 3-16 participants for adequate data saturation achievement in qualitative case study. Boddy (2016) argued that a sample size as small as one participant is justifiable. Researchers may change the total number of participants depending upon the point where they reach data saturation (Noohi et al., 2016).

Data saturation in qualitative research means further inquiry will not lead to new information (Noohi et al., 2016). Data saturation also means obtaining adequate relevant information via theme repetition (Yin, 2017). The number of participants in a sample is a difficult question for qualitative researchers (Tran, Porcher, Falissard, & Ravaud, 2016), and qualitative researchers are often criticized for using a small sample (Boddy, 2016). Despite criticism, a small sample size in a single case study can still be effective research (Boddy, 2016). In addition to effective sampling, a researcher must conduct a repetitive and consistent process and stop upon data saturation (Noohi et al., 2016). I worked to ensure repetitive consistency as I conducted participant interviews, and I stopped collecting data upon saturation.

Eligible participants for this study included six department leaders from a single retail organization in the southeastern United States who have used engagement strategies to improve profitability. Participant time and experience as a leader in retail varied. Participants were willing to share openly in an audio-recorded interview session. If a participant would have refused audio-recording, I would have simply continued with the interview, but thrown it out as incomplete material. Quality research is dependent upon consistency as well as recruiting quality participants with the appropriate knowledge and experience (Yin, 2017). A researcher is responsible for setting relevant eligibility parameters to ensure consistency (Strom et al., 2014).

Ethical Research

Following the highest ethical standards means protecting, not only the integrity of the research, but also the participants (Maskara, 2014; Pike, 2014). Ethics is about having value in research (Hammersley, 2015). Informed consent is one aspect of value and is necessary when conducting ethical research (Greenwood, 2016). Researchers gain informed consent to alleviate bias (Yin, 2017).

Obtaining consent also ensures participant protection (Hammersley, 2015). The informed consent form for this study provided a brief description of the complete study including participant privacy, procedures, benefits of participating in the study, the discomforts, as well as contact information for myself and the IRB or Participant Advocacy at Walden University. The consent form also makes participants fully aware of their rights (Aguila, Weidmer, Illingworth, & Martinez, 2016). Prior to conducting interviews, the participants, who were willing, read and signed the informed consent form. I obtained a copy as well as provided a copy for participants to ensure their rights. To protect participant privacy, I removed the consent form from the list of appendixes.

Participation in this study participation was completely voluntary. Part of conducting ethical research is informing participants that they have the right to refrain from answering any of the questions or withdraw from the study at any time (Gibbins, Bhatia, Forbes, & Reid, 2014; Trotter, 2014). Exiting the study is without obligation (Beskow, Check, & Ammarell, 2014). If he or she had chosen to withdraw from the study, he or she could do so by contacting me in person, by phone, or email. Should I have had someone who quit the study, I would have thanked him or her for their participation and immediately destroyed any documentation that he or she ever participated. Some researchers offer incentives (Namagey-Funo, Rimando, Brace, Christiana, & Fowles, 2014); however, there was no incentive for participation in this study. Offering incentive might have influenced the voluntary nature or response results (US Department of Health & Human Services, 1979).

Participant identities will remain anonymous, private, and confidential. Using a pseudonym code when referring to participants is an effective way to protect their anonymity and confidentiality (Yin, 2017). I referred to each participant as study participant (SP). I assigned pseudonyms such as SP1 through SP6. I will store participant and research information in a locked cabinet or safe deposit box for five years past graduation. Sensitive information must be protected and kept confidential as well as anonymous (Johnson, 2014). After five years, I will dispose of all forms of participants confidential information for their protection (Morse & Coulehan, 2014). I will delete all digital files and shred all paper documentation. The Walden University IRB has strict guidelines regarding participant care and ethical research. My IRB approval number is 03-22-18-0567542. I completed an online training for participant protection with the National Institute of Health (NIH). I have adhered to all university guidelines on conducting ethical research.

Data Collection Instruments

A researcher is the main data collection instrument in a qualitative study (Cope, 2014). Thus, I served as the primary data collection instrument. During the process, I conducted semistructured phone interviews using an interview protocol (Appendix A). During the interview protocol, I used a list of seven open-ended, semistructured, phone interview questions (Appendix B) to build an understanding around the research question. Yin (2017) explained that researchers use open-ended questions to build understanding of the overarching research question.

Furthermore, conducting qualitative case study research requires multiple evidence sources (Yin, 2017). Cope (2014) also added that qualitative researchers were personally responsible for reviewing study documents, observing participants, conducting interviews, and interpreting results in a way that brought credibility and trustworthiness as well as enhanced reliability and validity in sound research.

The interview protocol consisted of semistructured, open-ended phone interviews. Sarma (2015) explained that semistructured open-ended interview questions were appropriate in collecting qualitative data. Reuben and Bobat (2014) further added that interviews also allow for richer exchange between the interviewer and the participant. Each interview took place over the phone and lasted approximately 15-25 minutes. Phone interviews are appropriate when adequate in the data collection process (Saura & Balsas, 2014). During the interviews, Rossetto (2014) advised researchers to listen attentively. Audio recording of each interview is also a useful tool for increasing transcription accuracy (Harvey, 2015). Additionally, member checking aids researchers in enhancing validity (Marshall & Rossmann, 2014).

To enhance validity and reliability, I used audio recording during each interview and I used member checking following each interview. In this process, participants confirm the researcher’s conclusions regarding collected data (Dubois & Gadde, 2014). Following each interview, I transcribed the notes and wrote a summary of my conclusions. I then emailed my summary to each participant for his or her comments. I asked each participant to verify my conclusions of their interview and forward any changes to me via email within a specified time. As an additional measure for member checking, I immediately verified participant answers in my journal notes for the audio recording.

Qualitative researchers often use secondary data sources to supplement participant interviews (Yin, 2017). Supporting sources might include archival records, documentation, direct observation, or interviews (Yin, 2017). I supplemented the semistructured interviews with documentary evidence. Documents included internal archival documents about employee engagement training. In conjunction with interviewing, I used documentary evidence to increase reliability and validity. Triangulating interview data with data collected through other sources is a way for researchers to further explore a qualitative research phenomenon (Owen, 2014).

Data Collection Technique

Data collection included open-ended semistructured recorded phone interviews and a review of documentary evidence. According to Saura and Balsas (2014), semistructured phone interviews are a viable data collection source. I outlined this process in the interview protocol (Appendix A). Data collection is a systematic, detailed process that enables the researcher to collect adequate information to fulfill the research question (Jarkas & Horner, 2015). The primary data collection technique for this study was the semistructured, open-ended phone interview. The phone interview has grown more popular and serves as an adequate means of exploring qualitative phenomenon (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014).

Telephone interviews can be an advantage because they are an efficient and low-cost alternative to face-to-face interviews (Szolnoki & Hoffmann, 2013). Previously criticized for being impersonal, phone interviews increased bias and decreased intimacy; however, phone interviews provide more researcher control and have served as a social tool for long-standing familiarity to most participants (Saura & Balsas, 2014). Further, phone communication aids in reducing personal biases and beliefs (Drabble et al., 2015). I created a guide to use for each interview to make sure I was consistent.

There are some disadvantages associated with semistructured phone interviews (Saura & Balsas, 2014). One disadvantage to semistructured phone interviewing might include interaction development; however, all interviewing is still artificial social medium because conversation may not be completely organic in the presence of structured protocol. Another disadvantage to interviewing is researcher bias (Symon, Cassell, & Johnson, 2016). Interviews might also pose logistic and time difficulty (Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, & Pederson, 2013). I used member checking to avoid bias and I suggested alternate interview times to avoid time difficulty.

Despite some disadvantages, semistructured, open-ended phone interviews are appropriate for rich exchange with participants (Reuben & Bobat, 2014). Upon IRB approval, I followed my prescribed interview protocol (Appendix A). I used semistructured, audio-recorded, phone interviews and documented analysis to explore employee engagement strategies retail leaders use to increase profitability. The rationale for using this protocol was to make the process easier and more accessible for participants.

Further, document analogy increases rigor and may include reviewing documents such as annual reports, operation manuals, and financial documents (Phillips, Harrington, & Srai, 2017). I sent a letter of cooperation to a single retail organization seeking leadership approval to recruit eligible retail leaders within the organization to participate in my study. Once I received the list of names of those willing to participate, I then forwarded an informed consent form to willing participants. Upon receiving the informed consent document, potential participants then read, signed, and forwarded the form back to me. I retained a copy as well as extended a copy to each participant. The consent form explains participation, withdrawal, privacy, and all pertinent information necessary for protecting the participant.

Post interview, I transcribed the audio into Microsoft Word. I also immediately journaled and documented all notes after each interview. Immediate and consistent action is a good idea after each interview so that no information or reflective thoughts are lost (Rajesh & Ramesh, 2016). The participants had an opportunity to review and confirm interpretations (Dubois & Gadde, 2014). This process is called member checking (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

I relied on retail leaders to answer the designated questions, and I validated the results via member checking. Member checking is a research technique where participants confirm the researcher's conclusions (Andraski, Chandler, Powell, Humes, & Wakefield, 2014). I then loaded the interview data into NVivo 12 Plus, qualitative data analysis (QDA) software. Researchers use QDA software to sort and analyze data for accuracy and to identify themes (Woods, Paulus, Atkins, & Macklin, 2016).

Data Organization Technique

Collecting data means organizing the information in a way that is valuable to a given research project (Korhonen, 2014). Yin (2017) advised that researchers create a viable organization system prior to starting the data analysis process. An efficient data organization system is key in the research process and making sure participant experience is well-captured (Dennis, 2014). Good data organization is necessary for several reasons.

The systems I employed for data organization included journaling during each interview, audio recording, and backup mechanisms to protect the file information. Morse and Coulehan (2014) advised having a backup system for protecting files from corruption, fire, or confidentiality breach. To aid in this process, I maintain the files in a safe deposit box or similar location and will keep them for five years beyond graduation. After that time, I will shred the hard data and will erase all electronic files.

Data classification aids in final interpretation (Brennan & Bakken, 2015). Categorizing helps researchers keep interpretive and raw data separate (Yin, 2017).

Additionally, researchers often journal reflective thoughts following each interview (De Waal, Goedegebuure, & Tan Akaraborworn, 2014). An electronic filing system is useful in that process (De Waal et al., 2014).

I enlisted all of these organization techniques as I conducted research. I used a reflective journal after every interview so that I was sure to capture my thoughts in a timely fashion. I separated raw and interpretive data and will store the raw data, written, and audio, in a locked safe deposit box or cabinet for five years. To protect the participants, I created an electronic filling system and used the ficticious pseudonyms they were assigned in the inteview process (e.g., SP1, SP2). The file was password protected on my personal computer during the research process.

Data Analysis

Searching for meaning and clarity requires processing the qualitative data (Derobertmasure & Robertson, 2014). Even novice researchers must become proficient at collecting, identifying, and analyzing data to produce adequate research (Derobertmasure & Robertson, 2014). Data analysis is important to a research study because it aids a researcher in effectively processing and sharing outcomes (Yin, 2017). I conducted a single qualitative case study where the data analysis involved interviewing participants and reviewing company engagement training documents.

To strengthen data analogy, I used methodological triangulation. Yin (2017) described four types of triangulation: investigator, data, methodological, and theory. Qualitative researchers use methodological triangulation for multiple source data collection and analogy in case study research (Carter et al., 2014). Methodological triangulation was most appropriate for my study because I collected multiple data sources including documents for open-ended, semistructured phone interviews, training and evaluation, organizational human capital, and strategic goals. Triangulation is an important research aspect for identifying themes in data analogy across multiple sources (Johnson, 2015). Modell (2015) defined reviewing multiple data sources as triangulation in qualitative research. Triangulation is a way for a researcher to collect data and evaluate various levels and different perspectives regarding document and interview materials (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Triangulation is a way to increase reliability and validity (Wilson, 2014).

Planning logical and sequential steps for data analogy aids researchers in the process. Using a well-planned logical system for data analysis allows researchers to build coherent themes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2014). Yin (2017) provided researchers a process for data analysis: (a) compile, (b) disassemble, (c) reassemble, (d) interpret, and (e) conclude. After compiling and dissembling my data, I then reassembled the data to identify common themes. After manually working with the data, I loaded it into NVivo 12 Plus for interpretation before I made my final conclusions.

Qualitative researchers may sometimes use computer software, such as NVivo 12 Plus, to aid them in finding common coding and themes as well as interpreting results (Sotiriadou, Brouwers, & Le, 2014). I organized the data and uploaded it into the NVivo 12 Plus software program. NVivo is a viable tool that researchers use for assistance in identifying common codes and themes (Sotiriadou et al., 2014).

Borrego, Foster, and Froyd (2014) explained that the conceptual framework connects the findings, the literature, and the method. Kahn’s (1990) EET was the framework basis for this study. The conceptual framework of employee engagement served as the basis of my theme development. For an individual to experience full self-harnessing into their work role, he or she must have optimal working conditions (Kahn, 1990). Furthermore, Kahn (1990) explained that employers have the responsibility to provide employees with adequate resources if they expect to maintain employee engagement. Kahn’s engagement theory is in alignment with this study because employers can affect employee engagement. I explored employee engagement strategies retail leaders use to increase profitability. The final step before concluding data analogy is reviewing and categorizing recurring themes that support the conceptual framework (Carter et al., 2014). I completed this step in the data analysis process.

Linking the conceptual framework means examining and correlating themes (Teruel, Navarro, Gonzáles, López-Jaquero, & Montero, 2016). One method of correlating themes is mind mapping or concept mapping (Baugh, McNallen, & Frazelle, 2014). Mapping themes and concepts assists the researcher in recognizing any meaningful connections in data analogy (Umoquit, Tso, Varga-Atkins, O’Brien, & Wheeldon, 2013). I employed mind mapping, which is a visual representation, as a thematic tool.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are the value and credibility in qualitative research (see Noble & Smith, 2015). Often criticized, qualitative researchers enlist reliability and validity to strengthen their study accuracy and quality (Yin, 2017). Data collection and analysis are very complex in qualitative research making reliability and validity even more pressing (Sandelowski, 2014). Member checking is another tool that strengthens reliability and validity. Member checking enhances the quality of the interpretation and conclusions (Carter et al., 2014). I used member checking and confirmation immediately after each interview was transcribed.

Reliability

Reliability is trustworthiness in qualitative research (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). Reliability is also the ability for different researchers on separate occasions being able to draw the same conclusions from different methods (Kihn & Ihantola, 2015; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). Qualitative researchers can further increase reliability with more consistent measurement results (Szolnoki & Hoffman, 2013). Results and measurement consistency translate to dependability (Munn, Porritt, Lockwood, Aromataris, & Pearson, 2014). Dependability is simply cross-checking for consistency in conducting future research (Battisti, Dodaro, & Franco, 2014). Furthermore, LeCompte and Goetz (1982) suggested added an additional observer for cross-checking and consistency.

Dependability is a quality indicator for reliability (Battisti et al., 2014). Dependability is accounting for changing research contexts and allows for creating a research audit trail (Merriam, 2014; Elo et al., 2014). I increased reliability with dependability. I increased the reliability of my study by creating an audit trail detailing each context. The contexts included the purpose, sampling and participants, data collection and analysis, as well as research findings.

Validity

One way to improve validity is the researcher remaining aware of reflexive bias during the research process (Elo et al., 2014). Validity is also stronger when researchers abate reflexivity along with reporting more accurate observations and results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A method of reporting more accurate results is consistent member checking (Prion & Adamson, 2014). I member checked participant information following each interview transcription.

Credibility. Credibility is important to reporting with accuracy and creating believable research (Munn, Porritt, Lockwood, Aromataris, & Pearson, 2014). Qualitative researchers increase study credibility when they take more time to pinpoint accuracy with participants, observation, member checking, and other checkpoints for efficient data analogy (Houghton et al., 2013). Credibility also increases when researchers member check for thematic patterns (Prion & Adamson, 2014). Credibility is dependent upon reliable and valid research (Anney, 2014). Research is also more credible when participants believe and trust the study outcome (Houghton et al., 2013).

The goal is to try and decrease researcher bias (Baskarada, 2014). Member checking, interview protocol, and multiple data sourcing or triangulation are strategies for increasing research credibility (Durif-Bruckert et al., 2014). I used these steps as strategies for increasing research credibility.

Transferability. Dennis (2014) described transferability as translatable study results when participants or subjects are interchanged (Dennis, 2014). Transferable results present significance in versatile participant settings (Cope, 2014). Rigor and consistency make it easier for other researchers to use the findings for future research (Elo et al., 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2014. Elo et al. (2014) explained that findings in one study maintained significance in the next via competent and adequate reporting.

To enhance the chances of transferability, I made sure I was consistent and detailed about member checking. Cavalcanti (2017) insisted that qualitative research must be transparent and transferable. Further, I have also provided research information such as including industry and geographic information for external validity. I also provided information about the assumptions and contextual structure. Further, I meticulously adhered to the data collection and analysis techniques for the research design. I did this using an interview protocol and making sure I reached data saturation. Data saturation occurs when no new themes, information, or codes arise (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). I continued to interview participants until I achieved data saturation.

Confirmability. Confirmable study conclusions should not contain personal opinions of a researcher (Cope, 2014). Confirmability means that researchers take essential steps to extinguish personal bias such as providing documentation and reporting in an accurate manner (Houghton et al., 2014). One way to ensure accuracy in confirmability is to gain trust from all participants so that they are comfortable relaying factual information (Westerman, Spence, & Van Der Heide, 2014). I ensured confirmability by keeping a detailed and consistent research process including adequate member checking, reflective journaling, and accurate reporting.

Transition and Summary

The purpose of this qualitative single case study is to explore strategies business leaders use to increase profitability in the retail industry. I restated the purpose in Section 2. I also provided justification for using qualitative methodology and case study design. I also included in Section 2 the sampling technique, an ethics discussion, and the data collection technique. Upon IRB approval, I conducted the study and presented its findings as well as the application of professional practice in Section 3. I also discussed recommendations for action, my reflections on the research process, and implications for further research as well as implications for social change.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore engagement strategies that some retail leaders use to improve profitability. Disengaged retail employees affect profit. As a result, multiple employee engagement strategies exist that leaders can use to improve profitability. After interviewing participants and reviewing other data sources, I identified four major employee engagement strategy themes: (a) have daily staff interaction, (b) hire the right people for the job, (c) create a fun positive work environment, and (d) have regular one-on-one interaction with every staff member. These themes represented recurring commonalities in leader strategic approaches to engaging employees for a more profitable retail business.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question follows: What employee engagement strategies do retail leaders use to improve profitability? To answer the overarching research question, I conducted semistructured phone interviews with six retail sales leaders from a single organization in the southeastern United States. During the interview process, I followed an interview protocol (Appendix A). I called each participant individually and posed to each participant the same set of questions in the same order. I informed each participant that each call was recorded via a conference line and that I would be synthesizing the recorded as well as handwritten results. There was no scheduled time set for each call. At the general sales manager's instruction, who was also the gatekeeper, I called in for each leader one by one. If they were unavailable, I called back. The only time I was told to avoid was their daily sales meeting which they conducted first thing.

The data collection structure appropriate for this study was methodological triangulation. Triangulation is collecting and reviewing multiple data sources (Modell, 2015). To obtain a vigorous understanding of employee engagement strategies retail leaders use to improve profitability, I chose this method.

I coded the participants SP1 through SP6. I confirmed my data by reviewing organizational sales training and customer service documentation along with the interviews. I also visited with the customer service manager about the customer service process they believe is key to improving profitability and sales.

Yin (2017) provided researchers a five-step data analysis process: (a) compile, (b) disassemble, (c) reassemble, (d) interpret, and (e) conclude. I used these steps for data collection and analysis. I compiled information by taking notes during each interview. Immediately following each interview, I verified my note summary with each participant before ending the recording. I also emailed a transcription copy as a second member-checking verification. To disassemble the information, I transcribed the audio results with Microsoft Word processing. To reassemble, I uploaded my transcribed notes into NVivo 12 Plus. NVivo 12 Plus has several features qualitative researchers can use to verify themes. For the interpretation process, I used word search, queries, and coding to identify major themes.

I wrote my conclusions following data interpretation. During the data analysis process, four main themes arose: (a) have daily staff interaction, (b) hire the right people for the job, (c) create a fun positive work environment, and (d) have regular one-on-one interaction with every staff member. The sales leaders were all consistent in their paradigm regarding these four major themes for employee engagement strategies that improve profitability.

Theme 1: Daily Interaction

All six study participants expressed how consistent daily interaction helped their respective sales teams stay engaged and be more profitable. Daily interaction also coincides with theme 4, one-on-one interaction with every staff member. SP1 explained how all of the sales leaders make a practice of having daily meetings and interaction with their teams. SP1 said, “I try to get one-on-one with just about every employee day to day.”

SP2 explained how frequently leaders meet with either the entire staff as a group or one-on-one. If there are challenges, they try and work them out together. SP2 added, “I manage my people, talk with them one-on-one, motivate through sales meetings in the mornings, every morning.” SP3 shared, “We talk to each and every one of them every day and just make sure everything is okay.” SP3 also shared that staff members feel comfortable visiting with leaders at their organization about almost any challenge because leaders prioritize building relationships via daily interaction.

SP4 described various incentives that are attached to engagement activities with daily and hourly updates: “I try to walk around and tell every person good morning.” SP4 also explained that engagement and profitability are linked to daily data. The daily data is a good indicator of who is engaged and who is not. SP5 explained:

> We have a daily sales meeting to go over what we have going on and record what we're selling and things like that and during the meeting we'll do different things to motivate the sales people to get them back with a positive attitude- sometimes it's paying bonuses when they do good on certain things.

SP6 further added that sales can sometimes be a frustrating business and that daily touches with the sales team help employees get out of a productivity slump and keeps them lifted. SP6 also mentioned that part of daily or frequent engagement interaction is re-training sales team members if they found themselves stagnant and need inspiration for productivity.

Abukhalifeh and Som (2013) confirmed in the literature that interaction inspires productivity. As the interview participants discussed, positive daily interaction is conducive to building engagement. Thus, employees are more engaged when they receive positive feedback, more autonomy, and support (Menguc et al., 2013). The literature confirms and supports theme one.

Theme 1, daily interaction, also satisfies Kahn's third engagement tenet, physical engagement. Daily interaction is an example of active engagement. Physical engagement is intentional alignment with one's organization (Alagarja & Shuck, 2015; Kim & Schachter, 2015; Star, Russ-Eft, Braverman, & Levine, 2016). Physical engagement also requires both emotional as well as cognitive engagement (Kahn, 1990). Thus, daily interaction inspires movement or physical engagement activity. In recent literature since the time of this study, Yang and Treadway (2018) confirmed that the lack of interaction creates counterproductive work behaviors among employees. SP4 expressed the importance of interacting with one’s team as many times as necessary to meet goals. SP1, SP3, SP4, and SP5 shared various incentives such as bonuses, premium parking, vacation, and hot meals used to accompany daily interaction. Compared with Valentin et al. (2015), disengagement is the result of employees being detached from their work roles because of little or no leader interaction. All six participants confirmed that daily engagement interaction is imperative to increased engagement for profitability.

Theme 2: Hire the Right People

The second theme identified from the study is hire the right people who are the best fit for the job and the organizational environment. All six participants mentioned the importance of hiring the right people. In the interviews, the study participants each voiced collective sentiment that increasing employee engagement with profitable results is about creating a positive culture along with the right mix of people.

SP1 shared how employees who are appropriately aligned in their job, according to organizational fit, want to be a part of a great environment. SP1 stated:

> Usually when I hire, I’ll hire people that have a background in sports or something competitive, so we bring the competitiveness to the sales floor—people that have been able to overcome obstacles and showed success in their past.

SP2 further added, that not only should a sales force have the right people, but it should also have the right sales inventory and tools to aid them in success. The right scenario must be in the right place in order for customers to have an optimal buying experience which leads to improved profitability. SP3 said, “Hire nice and friendly people who already live that lifestyle. Our employees know that customers are the most important thing, that's why we're in business."

SP4 expressed that even though employing the right people is important, it is also important to remember that they are people,

> People are people, they're not just production units. They're not robots, they're people- with people problems, people feelings, people stuff and yeah you got to push the production but if you understand the person you can get the production.

SP5 added that even though real sales people have challenges, leaders have to be willing to tell them when they are falling short of the sales goals. SP6 added: "first thing in the morning, get everybody's head in the right attitude." Considering the participant findings, the literature supports theme two. Having the right people on board increases productivity.

Theme 2 findings, hire the right people, are also relevant to Kahn's conceptual theory because job alignment is conducive to organizational strategic achievement (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). According to Brajer-Marczak (2014), engagement is a continuous strategic process in developing productive human capital. Job alignment, or having the right people in the right place, is a part of that strategic cycle (a) hire the right people, (b) create a conducive work environment, and (c) increase organizational profitability with an engaged workforce (Brajer-Marczak, 2014). Hiring people in the right job and organizational fit is more conducive to a positive work environment, which leads into theme three. Having the right people in job alignment aids leaders in decreasing hindrances and setbacks as well as aids in increased employee engagement (Tims et al., 2016). Once the right people are in place, commitment is also important.

Further supporting theme 2 and compared to Cloutier, Felusiak, Hill, and Pemberton-Jones (2015), positive organizational outcomes are connected to engagement productivity. Commitment from the right employees in the right place is paramount to positive work outcomes (Sondheim et al., 2017). Leaders perform an important function to positive outcomes when they place the right people.

Alagaraja and Shuck (2015) further confirmed in the literature that matching people with appropriate job alignment is conducive to organizational profitability. Job alignment, or hiring the right people in the right place, is an important part of the productivity process (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). The participants were specific in the importance of taking the right steps to get teams aligned.

One specific job alignment activity, which is mentioned in the literature, includes the right people practicing the right behaviors to increase employee job satisfaction and engagement (Audenaert et al., 2014). Fu and Deshpande (2014) suggested that leaders attempt to hire people who will fit into the current staff and organizational culture. Better aligned people tend to be more highly engaged (Fu & Deshpande, 2014). Work environment and job satisfaction relate to engagement and productivity (Fu & Deshpande, 2014). Having the right people means also creating a positive work environment.

The right people with the right attitude aids in building a positive work environment and job satisfaction for the group (Fu & Deshpande, 2014) as further confirmed and indicated in the theme three. Theme 2 is confirmation of a part of Kahn's (1990) conceptual approach on all three tenets that highly engaged workers need optimal conditions to thrive emotionally, cognitively, and physically.

In support of the second theme, all six study participants mentioned in their respective interviews the importance of hiring the right people for the job and the organizational culture. As a result, the participants expressed that the workforce would be more engaged and more profitable. Compared to Radda et al. (2015), job alignment and engagement are linked to productivity. This strategy is in support of the research question answering what employee engagement strategies retail leaders use to improve profitability.

Theme 3: Create a Fun Positive Work Environment

Leaders at this particular organization explained how creating a positive work culture is one of the most important strategic goals. All six participants mentioned creating a positive culture and the importance it holds to increasing employee engagement. In support of such ideals, there were 59 occurrences revealed in coding related to creating a fun and positive work environment. Theme 2 was foundational to theme 3.

SP1 said, "I try to create a culture people want to be at and be a part of." SP1 also shared that, "if you've created a successful culture, and a competitive culture, then they become very uncomfortable in that if they're not engaged." SP2 further indicated, "They know we're on the same team." SP3 explained that the team works together to put customers first and that is why they are still in business. SP4 added "This is why we're here, let's make it fun this month or this week or whatever." SP5 stressed the importance of maintaining a positive work environment because "One negative sales person can take out a whole sales staff."

Further, a positive work culture and increased engagement is profitability (Townsend et al., 2014). Theme three confirmed the overarching research question of strategies retail leaders use for employee engagement to increase profitability. Creating a positive work environment is part of a strategic success cycle (Brajer-Marczak, 2014). Since the time of the original proposal for this study, Gamero-Burón and Lassibille (2018) concluded that leadership can have a positive effect on employees at work. Leader efforts do play a role in engagement and productivity levels based on the work environment leaders create (Gamero-Burón & Lassibille, 2018). Leadership matters in creating a positive work environment.

There are certain benefits attached to creating an ideal work environment and engagement is key to that paradigm (Anitha, 2014; Shuck & Reio, 2014). The right people aligned in the right jobs aids leaders in creating optimal work environments and conditions (Kahn, 1990). Zhang et al. (2014) confirmed that creating a positive environment enhanced an employee's ability to better do their job. Menguc et al. (2013) also added that positive interactions render positive results on employee engagement. In keeping with Kahn's theory, cognitively engaged team members own a shared purpose (Shuck, 2015). A shared purpose leads into theme 4. Individuals become better team members when they are connected to leaders as a result of one-on-one interaction.

Theme 4: One-on-One Interaction

All six participants voiced the importance of the fourth theme, one-on-one interaction, as an important engagement strategy. One-on-one interaction also coincides with theme 1, daily interaction. SP1 shared the importance of getting one on one with every employee daily:

> I'm one-on-one or I try to get one-on-one with just about every employee day to day. I have sales meetings first thing in the morning just to talk to the sales staff and I want to be the first one in front of them just to see where they're at mentally. Then you usually can identify something through their actions to know whether there's something going on and then I'll go to them one-on-one. I'm pretty hands on with each employee.

SP2 described how one-on-one interaction is key to motivating and engaging employees. Positive interactions render positive effects on engagement.

SP2 also explained, "One-on-one. I just go straight to them. We have sales meetings with the whole staff and periodically I do one-on-ones with them." SP3 also recommended section leaders have daily talks with each team member as an engagement strategy. SP4 further suggested using one-on-one's as a way to encourage staff to engage for more profitability: "You know that's going to vary based on the individual and that's going to vary based on the lack of participation or engagement and it first starts with a talk one-on-one."

SP4 also described grilling steaks and other incentives as inspiration for engagement towards profitable goals. SP5 explained that the emotional side of sales engagement is one of the biggest things. One negative salesperson can take out an entire team making one-on-one interaction paramount to leaders having a handle on individual attitudes. Getting with each sales person one-on-one is important to maintaining morale. SP5 noted,

> Not only are they not doing what I need them to do, but they are brining my people down as well. One negative salesperson can take out a whole sales staff. So, what we would do when we see that happening is pull them to the side and find out what’s going on because sometimes you’ve got things in your personal life that will affect you. You know when we talk to them and try to help them and most of the time that works.

SP6 further added that one-on-one interaction with leadership is essential to a healthy, productive, engaged, team.

Supporting theme 4, leader interaction with team members inspires a positive work culture (Alagaria & Shuck, 2015). A positive work culture occurs when a worker experiences psychological agreement between organizational and individual goals supported by one-on-one interaction with leadership (Alagaria & Shcuck, 2015). Alagarja and Shuck (2015) called this process working cohesively towards the same organizational goals. This concept confirms Kahn’s cognitive engagement theory. Cognitive engagement is a personal appraisal of one’s safe and meaningful work environment (Shuck & Reio, 2011). Purcell (2014) defined cognitive engagement as a worker’s psychological state of mind while at work.

The theme 4 finding, one-on-one interaction, is also conceptually relevant. One-on-one engagement is important because positive interactions render positive effects on employee engagement (Menguc et al., 2013). All six participants referenced extensive examples of the need for one-on-one interaction with their salesforce in order to increase engagement and profitability. Employees are more engaged when they feel supported (Menguc et al., 2013). The findings for this theme also support Kahn's engagement tenet for emotion.

Emotional engagement is a high level of well-being (Kahn, 1990). Emotional engagement is bonding and sharing oneself with the organization (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). SP5 stated that sales is an emotional task. SP5 also stated the importance of staying positive and having a good time at work. SP5 further noted that negativity stagnates productivity, making one-on-one interaction with leaders even more important. One-on-one interaction causes employees to bond (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). Bonding, or emotional engagement is about being able to identify with a task, project, or goal at the current moment of engagement (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). Individual, group, or goal engagement is key to communication one-on-one expectations.

An example of research contribution for one-on-one and goal engagement since the initial proposal approval of this study incudes Schaltegger and Burritt (2018). Schaltergger and Burritt (2018) explored links between kinds of CSR and various ethical motivations as individual and organizational goals. Organizations have financial as well as reputational concerns when involving staff in CSR engagement (Schaltergger & Burritt, 2018).

SP3 confirmed, “We’ve moved to social media and we give back to the community a lot. We do a lot of stuff for the community and they see that as well.” SP5 added, “In a small town like we’re in, you can’t just rely on people walking in off the street. You’ve got to have people sending people to you because you treated them how they wanted to be treated.” Community involvement as an organizational goal is a key development since the time of the original proposal for this engagement research.

Overall Findings Applied to the Conceptual Framework

Findings revealed employee engagement strategies that retail sales leaders could use to improve profitability. These findings support the conceptual framework. Kahn’s EET is the basis for this study. In Kahn’s theory, there are three tenets including emotional, cognitive, and physical engagement (Kahn, 1990). Emotional engagement is high well-being (Kahn, 1990). Cognitive engagement is meaningful work (Kumar & Panasari, 2015). Physical engagement is an employee’s action as a result of them being both emotionally and cognitively engaged (Shuck & Reio, 2014). Optimal working conditions are required for employees to experience a full harnessing or work engagement (Cheema et al., 2015). The findings for this study are relevant to the theory because the four prominent themes supported these claims based on participant feedback and literature application.

One of the new research additions as well as the findings to this study confirmed that various types of engagement can lead to profitability. CSR involvement was a minor theme in this study and fit in tandem with study ideals. CSR is an antecedent to employee engagement and is crucial to an organization’s sustainable success for customer service

(Schaltergger & Burritt, 2018; Valentin et al., 2015; Slack et al., 2015). CSR is a part of this retail organization's sales initiative. SP3 and SP5 confirmed this aspect as an engagement strategy in interview feedback as an example of professional practice application.

Leadership also plays a significant role in creating a positive environment to enhance an employee's ability to better do their job (Zhang et al., 2014). Employees are more engaged when they receive positive feedback, more autonomy, and support from leaders (Menguc et al., 2013). Furthermore, leadership is one of the most impactful productivity tools because leaders inspire the most positive productivity (Lin & Hsiao, 2014). The idea supported Kahn's theory that leaders are responsible for encouraging engagement while fostering a conducive work environment and minimizing tensions that might affect the three engagement attributes including physical, emotional, or cognitive engagement (Rana et al., 2014). The lack of leadership support can cause emotional exhaustion and disengagement (Kemp et al., 2013). These strategic findings are applicable to professional practice for retail leaders.

Applications to Professional Practice

Retail leaders could benefit from study findings because it provides additional information as to how leaders might use effective employee engagement strategies to increase profitability in retail. According to Glavas (2016), almost 87% of the worldwide workforce was disengaged as of 2016. The findings of this study support the idea that there are professional practice action steps retail leaders can take to engage employees for increased profitability (a) have daily interaction, (b) hire the right people, (c) create a fun and positive work environment, and (d) have one-on-one interaction.

Furthermore, study findings contribute to the body of literature showing daily interaction, hiring the right people, creating a positive work environment, and having one-on-one interaction are effective strategies for increasing engagement and profitability. Leader interaction with employees creates a positive work culture (Alagaria & Shuck, 2015). The results of this study could be applicable across industries and may provide additional knowledge for novice as well as seasoned managers. Additionally, acting on engagement is part of an organization's strategic cycle (Brajer-Marczak, 2014). Each of the themes support strategies of engagement via employee job alignment and leadership interaction. Increased employee engagement means increased profitability (Kumar & Pansari, 2015). Each emergent theme evident in study findings shows promise as viable engagement strategy if leaders devote the action to professional practice.

Implications for Social Change

Society could benefit from the results of this study. As of 2016, the number of employees in the U.S. retail industry exceeded 15.7 million people (Farfan, 2016). Engaged employees are more productive and employable (Kumar & Pansari, 2015). In addition, engaged employees help increase organizational profitability (Purcell, 2014). When small retail businesses operate profitably, business owners could reinvest profits and offer sustained employment to a workforce, which may contribute to the economic well-being of communities.

The results from this study could benefit retail business leaders in their daily interaction with employees. Engagement influences profitability. Organizations are more profitable when employees are engaged (Kumar & Pansari, 2015). According to Farfan (2016), the retail industry is vast. More profitability could create more stability in the workforce.

Recommendations for Action

The objective of this qualitative single case study was to explore employee engagement strategies retail business leaders use to improve profitability. Study findings revealed four employee engagement themes that retail business leaders could employ to improve profitability: (a) having daily team interaction, (b) hiring the right people, (c) creating a fun positive work environment, and (d) scheduling regular one-on-one interaction. I noted some recommendations for retail business leaders based on the study findings that might increase engagement and residually improve profitability.

Retail business leaders might consider making an effort to create an ideal environment that inspires engagement. Engagement starts with leadership (Oswick, 2015). Engagement also requires leaders to communicate early and often. The retail organization I chose for this study was a very successful organization. Their profitability is that of organizations two to three times their size. Each leader I interviewed seemed very emphatic about the necessity of incorporating the study themes into their daily, weekly, and monthly activities for engaging their people and improving their profitability.

Engagement is a key strategic factor in many industries making other areas besides retail benefit from this study. With only 13% of the world's workforce engaged in their jobs (Glavas, 2016), diverse industries might begin to require engagement strategies. The participants from the research organization were consistent and succinct in their engagement and profitability strategies. Such strategies would be a good place to start across industries. One example of presenting such findings might start at association conferences such as sales or human resources.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore employee engagement strategies retail leaders use to improve profitability. The research focus was a single retail organization in the southeastern United States. Study findings implicated further research for several reasons. First, other industries other than retail may benefit considering the large number of a disengaged worldwide workforce.

Second, there are various aspects of how researchers could conduct other studies. For example, there were quite a few secondary themes that could be explored such as ways to implement strategies instead of simply naming strategies. Finally, researchers could also consider geographical location and how engagement levels may vary based on specified factors such as leader interaction, job satisfaction, and alignment.

To encourage further discussion of the results, I will disseminate the results of this study using several strategies. I will share a summary of the findings with the participants. In addition, I will publish this study through the ProQuest/UMI dissertation database for future researchers to use. Finally, I plan to work with my Chair to present the results of this study at academic and professional conferences and publish my findings in peer-reviewed journals.

Reflections

Completing a DBA has been one of the most challenging, yet, rewarding opportunities of my life. I knew the program would be challenging; however, I embraced the challenge. I also had experience in retail, but I did not know the participants prior to collecting data. As a researcher, I would not say that I had bias going into the research process, but I really gained a deeper understanding as to why it is of the utmost importance to follow protocol in the qualitative process. I also learned new knowledge about how succinct the retail sales process is and how engagement works in tandem to improve profitability.

As a qualitative researcher, my goal was to collect data without bias. I made sure I continually reviewed the recipe I wrote in the initial proposal to make sure the process held validity. The participants were very organized and detailed, and I was grateful for that part of the process. I think they might be affected in a positive way because they seemed to take pride in sharing with me how they have obtained and continued success as a team. I learned knew knowledge after gathering data in this process. I learned employee engagement strategies that might help retail leaders improve profitability.

Conclusion

Employee engagement strategies are imperative to organizational strategic success. The overarching research question of this single qualitative case study was: What employee engagement strategies do retail leaders use to improve profitability? I conducted semistructured phone interviews to gather data. In addition to the interviews, I also reviewed sales process and customer service training documentation to supplement data collection. I used information from the methodological triangulation data collection process to validate data source themes. The conceptual framework included Kahn's EET engagement tenets of emotional, cognitive, and physical engagement (Kahn, 1990).

Study findings revealed four major themes on employee engagement strategies that improve profitability: (a) have daily employee interaction, (b) hire the right people, (c) create a positive work environment, and (d) have regular one-on-one interaction. The social change benefit is a more engaged workforce and improved organizational profitability for a more stable job market.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview: Exploring strategies that will improve profitability in retail.

1. I will begin the interviews with greetings and introductions as well as thank the participants for agreeing to participate in the interview. I will introduce myself as well as the research topic in the initial greeting.
2. I will remind participants of the consent form and ensure that they have read and signed it.
3. I will give participants a copy of the consent form for their records.
4. I will remind the participants that everything shared in the interview is confidential.
5. I will remind the participants that their participation is voluntary and that they are free to withdraw at any time.
6. I will remind the participants that I will be audio-taping and transcribing the interview for accuracy. I will make the transcription available to them via email for their review.
7. I will review the interview protocol and procedures. We will begin interviewing. At the end, I will thank them for their participation in my research study.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

To complete my research question, I will use open-ended semistructured phone interviews. The interview questions are as follows:

1. What employee engagement strategies do you use to improve profitability?
2. How did you implement these employee engagement strategies?
3. Why do you think your strategies were successful?
4. What employee engagement strategies do you use to identify the difference between engaged employees versus disengaged employees?
5. What employee engagement strategies do you use to increase engagement among those who are disengaged once identified?
6. What strategies will you use for ongoing improvements for increasing employee engagement to improve profitability?
7. What additional information can you share regarding strategies to keep employees highly engaged?