

2018

# Leadership Strategies for Enhancing Employee Engagement

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2018

Abstract

Leadership Strategies for Enhancing Employee Engagement

by

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MBA, DeVry University, Keller Graduate School of Management, 2008

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

October 2018

## Abstract

In the food manufacturing industry, employee engagement is critical to the survival of organizations because engaged employees increase productivity, profitability, and sustainability. Using the transformational leadership theory, the purpose of this single case study was to explore strategies that leaders in the food-manufacturing industry in the northeastern region of the United States use to engage employees. Participants were purposefully selected based upon their experience implementing effective employee engagement strategies. Data were collected through face-to-face semistructured interviews with 7 food manufacturing leaders and the review of organizational documents on employee engagement. Data were analyzed using inductive coding of phrases, word frequency searches, and theme interpretation. The 3 themes that emerged were: involving employees in decision-making increased employee engagement, open and honest communication promoted employee engagement, and recognition and compensation increased employee engagement. The findings from this study contribute to social change by providing food manufacturing leaders with insights that can promote organizational growth, enhance sustainability, and increase productivity and profitability. An increase in profitability and productivity might lead to new employment opportunities and promote prosperity for local families and the community.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my Heavenly Father for his grace and mercy and for giving me the endurance to complete this doctoral program. I also dedicate this degree to my loving and devoted husband Master Sergeant Leslie Bradley, for continually providing me spiritual uplift, personal encouragement, patience, and financial contribution to embark on this journey. Your support, prayers, an encouraging burst of inspiration allowed me to succeed. You never lost faith in me during my darkest hours or when I wrestled with giving up. Your faith in our Heavenly Father has been my guiding star. Additionally, I would like to dedicate this study to my sons Ernest Jr. and Travis, my grandson Travis Jr., and my mom Ada Frierson. This trajectory has been tough, long, yet worthwhile and would have not been achievable without your prayers, cheers, and understanding.

I dedicate this study to Dr. Gergana Velkova, my chair who pushed me to get it right and not give up. I also dedicate this study to my high school English teacher the late Dr. Rosella G. Toney who established the standards for my success from the moment I met her. Finally, to all my Walden colleagues who never gave up on me and encouraged me every step of the way although our paths have never crossed.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Increasing employee engagement is important because engaged workers are more productive than disengaged employees. Employee engagement is critical and leads to a competitive advantage (Anitha, 2014). Disengaged employees cost organizations and the United States economy over \$300 billion annually (Abbas, Raja, Darr, & Bouckennooghe, 2014). By reducing employee disengagement, leaders enable their organizations to compete more effectively, which in turn increases profitability and survivability (Anitha, 2014). By increasing employee engagement, leaders can decrease employee turnover; which reduces the cost associated with hiring new employees (Abbas et al., 2014). Because promoting employee engagement is an inexpensive strategy, leaders must care about creating a work environment that promotes worker engagement to increase employee job satisfaction and reduces employee turnover.

### **Background of the Problem**

There are numerous disadvantages resulting from increased employee disengagement. One of the worst effects of employee disengagement is increased customer dissatisfaction (Farrell, 2016). Disengaged employees tend to be unhappy with their jobs; dissatisfied workers often quit their jobs in pursuit of other employment opportunities (Abbas et al., 2014). Employee disengagement also leads to customer dissatisfaction because customers sense and respond to unhappy workers with decreased loyalty (Truss, Delbridge, Alfes, Shantz, & Soane, 2013). In addition, disengaged workers are less effective at providing adequate customer service or support and over time, customer loyalty to an organization decreases (Farrell, 2016).

Engaged employees create bonds with clients that lead to improved customer loyalty and satisfaction (Farrell, 2016; Truss et al., 2013). Engaged workers are also more motivated and committed to the organization as the result of increased job satisfaction; while disengaged employees feel indifferent about their organizations because of increased job dissatisfaction (Brajer-Marczak, 2014). The literature indicates a connection between disengaged workers and reduced productivity; researchers recommend leaders promote employee engagement to eliminate the problem (Farrell, 2016; Truss et al., 2013). Increased employee disengagement is detrimental to the survival of an organization, which make practices that lead to increased employee turnover unsustainable (Brajer-Marczak, 2014). Because increased employee disengagement leads to decreased productivity, managers must actively promote employee engagement.

### **Problem Statement**

Employee engagement is critical to organizational competitive advantage (Anitha, 2014). Disengaged employees cost organizations and the United States economy over \$300 billion annually (Abbas et al., 2014). The general business problem is that employee disengagement has a negative impact on organizational productivity and profits. The specific business problem is that some business leaders in the food manufacturing industry lack strategies to engage employees.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies that leaders in the food-manufacturing industry use to engage employees. The population of

the study consisted of seven food manufacturing business leaders located in northeastern United States who have implemented strategies to engage employees. The implications for positive social change include the potential to enhance leaders' understanding of effective strategies to increase employee engagement, which could lead to increasing organizational profitability and growth. Increased organizational profitability and growth may lead to new employment opportunities and promote prosperity for local families and the community.

### **Nature of the Study**

I used the qualitative research method for this study. The qualitative method of exploration enables researchers to ask open-ended questions to enable participants to share their perspectives (Casey, Houghton, Murphy, & Shaw, 2013). The qualitative method was most appropriate for this study because using it enabled me to ask open-ended questions to explore and understand participants experiences concerning the leadership strategies managers used to engage their employees.

A quantitative study was not appropriate because researchers use quantitative methods when they seek to examine relationships or differences among variables, deliver findings in a numerical or mathematical form, and generalize from a sample of a target population (Brockington, 2014). Researchers use the mixed-method approach to answer questions from a quantitative perspective stemming from qualitative data (Etikan, 2016). Mixed-method researchers collect, analyze, and combine both quantitative and qualitative data into the study (Palinkas et al., 2011).

A single qualitative case study design was the most appropriate design for this study because researchers can use a case study design to explore and distinguish among the phenomena of the study and its context (Yin, 2014). A qualitative case study is an in-depth exploration strategy enabling researchers to explore a specific and complex phenomenon within its real-world context (Yin, 2015). In a case-study, researchers ask *how* and *why* questions to identify and explore findings from the case study topic (Aladin, 2017). I chose a case study design to explore strategies that leaders in the food-manufacturing industry use to engage employees within a single food manufacturing organization. The use of other qualitative designs such as phenomenology or ethnography would not have served the purpose of this study. A phenomenological study was not appropriate because it involves the human experience from the view of those living the phenomenon (Wilson & Washington, 2007). An ethnographic study was not appropriate because the practices of individuals, organizations, groups, and communities in their natural habitat was not the focus of this study (Reeves, Peller, Goldman, & Kitto, 2013).

### **Research Question**

Developing a research question was the first step in conducting scholarly research (Alkahtani, 2015). The research question served as a guide for all stages of data inquiry, data analysis, and reporting (Breevaart, Bakker, Demerouti, & Heuvel, 2015). In addition, a well-developed research question provides scholars with purpose and focus for their projects. The overarching research question in this study was: What strategies do food-manufacturing leaders use to engage employees. The interview questions are as follows:

### **Interview Questions**

1. What strategies have you used to engage your food-manufacturing employees?
2. How did employees respond to those strategies?
3. What methods or techniques were most effective in engaging your employees?
4. What are some of the benefits of implementing employee engagement strategies?
5. What obstacles keep you from engaging employees?
6. How, if at all, did performance improve because of effective engagement strategies?
7. What additional information or examples would you like to contribute to this subject on successful employee engagement strategies?

### **Theoretical or Conceptual Framework**

Transformational leadership theory served as the conceptual framework for this study. Burns developed the transformational leadership framework in 1978. Bass (1985) later extended the works of Burns by addressing how transformational leaders inspire workers to improve performance and engage in organizational efforts. Burns used the transformational leadership theory to provide an explanation for leadership based on the premise that leaders can inspire employees to transform expectations, perceptions, and motivations to work toward common goals. Key propositions underlying the theory are: (a) individualized consideration, (b) intellectual stimulation, (c) inspirational motivation,

and (d) idealized influences. Using the transformational leadership theory for this study provided a lens for participants to explain their perceptions and experiences regarding leaders' transformational leadership characteristics as they pertained to employee engagement.

Bass (1985) noted that being able to engage or inspire employees is one of the characteristics that define transformational leaders. Using transformational leadership in the framework highlighted the role of leaders in influencing the behaviors of employees, including their work engagement (Kovjanic, Schuh, & Jonas, 2013; Schmitt, Den Hartog, & Belschak, 2016). Other researchers have used the transformational framework in employee engagement studies. Kovjanic et al. (2013) and Schmitt et al. (2016) used the transformational leadership theory as the theoretical framework in their studies on work engagement. The researchers found that transformational leadership behavior had a positive impact on employee engagement and job performance. According to Breevaart, et al. (2015), transformational leaders can influence the daily work engagement of employees and meeting or exceeding expectations.

### **Operational Definitions**

The following key terms operationally defined:

*Employee engagement:* Employee engagement refers to employees perceive as motivated, satisfied, and committed with their jobs (Agrali, Taskin, & Unal, 2017).

*Food manufacturing industry:* The food manufacturing industry is a business sector that involves the manufacturing of a wide range of edible products such as cakes,



candies, beverages, dairy products, canned foods, and condiments (Hinman, Delany, Campbell, Gale, & 2016).

*Leadership strategies:* Leadership strategies refer to the different ways leaders use their positions to influence change or achieve organizational goals (Gruber, Smerek, Thomas-Hunt, & James, 2015).

*Organizational performance:* Organizational performance refers to “the actual accumulated results of all the activities of an organization having achieved its goals” (Wang, 2015).

*Transformational leadership:* Transformational leadership is “a leadership style that enhances subordinates’ motivation, morale, and performance through a variety of mechanisms, such as showing an example, providing a sense of mission and vision, and challenging subordinates’ beliefs and assumptions” (Doci & Hofmans, 2015).

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

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are non-testable statements assumed to be true or correct (Zhuge, Chen, & Manica, 2016). My first assumption was that participants would be honest and provide information reflective of their experiences regarding strategies utilized to engage employees in the food-manufacturing industry. My second assumption was that the selection of the case study research design would enable me to gather rich and solid data concerning the strategies that leaders in the food-manufacturing industry in the northeastern region of the United States used to engage their employees. My third

assumption was that, because I work in the food-manufacturing industry, the business leaders would not be forthcoming with their answers due to my familiarity with the food-manufacturing industry.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of a study are matters or issues that may occur and are outside of the researcher's control (Zhuge et al., 2016). The first limitation was that the reliability of the results depended on the participants' honesty. The participants may have given biased views instead of their true perspectives to appear competent. This could impact the truthfulness of their responses. That would result in findings that do not reflect the actual situation on the ground. Secondly, the results of the study may not have applied to other organizations in the food and manufacturing industry. That was because the situations in each of the organizations may be contextually different from those of the participants.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations pertain to the boundaries that researchers set to limit the scope of the study (Qiu & Gullett, 2017). The first delimitation of the study was that only business leaders residing and working in the northeastern region of the United States participated in the study. The second delimitation was that only business leaders who had worked in the food-manufacturing industry for at least one or two years would participate. The third delimitation was that only business leaders from food manufacturing industry would participate in the study.

### **Significance of the Study**

Leaders must understand that taking initiatives to promote operational and process improvement are fundamentally essential in advancing organizational performance. The successes of organizational initiatives are not achievable without voluntary, willful participation, and engagement of employees (Alshammari, 2015). Employee engagement is one of the pivotal means for achieving and sustaining competitive advantage (Nair & Salleh, 2015). When employees are disengaged, organizations are affected via reduced revenues (Abbas et al., 2014). Enhancing employee engagement is important because of the positive organizational outcomes resulting from engaged employees (Barrick, Thurgood, Smith, & Courtright, 2015). Leaders in the food manufacturing industry may use the findings from this study to develop effective strategies for increasing employee engagement, motivation, productivity, and retention.

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

Organizational leaders focusing on increasing employee engagement both domestically and globally is important to the success of their organizations (Taneja, Sewell, & Odom, 2015). Employee engagement positively affects business outcomes such as higher commitment, enhanced performance, reduced turnover intention, decreased absenteeism, increased drive, and decreased burnout (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Zhuge et al. (2016) emphasized that employee engagement can lead to improved job performance, work participation, and satisfaction with the job, which can directly affect an organization's performance (Shuck & Reio, 2014). Findings from this study might help leaders of food manufacturing organizations gain new perspectives on the

development and implementation of engagement strategies that can lead to improved performance, profitability, growth, and competitive advantage.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Leaders of profitable businesses create possibilities that bring positive social change in their communities (Steiner & Atterton, 2014). The findings of this study may contribute to positive change by providing leaders effective employee strategies that increase employee retention and help lower unemployment rate in communities. Communities with organizations that have engaged employees are better able to contribute to the financial stability of local schools, community parks recreational activities, habitat for humanity, and civic work. The financial gains achieved because of having engaged employees can positively affect the local and national economy, resulting in communities that are stable, prosperous, and sustainable.

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

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore effective leadership strategies used by managers in the food manufacturing industry to increase employee engagement. This literature review provides the basis for exploring employee engagement in the food manufacturing industry and other business divisions. I organized the literature review by themes to improve content flow. The literature review encompasses a discussion of different types of leadership styles researchers have used to explore employee turnover in the food manufacturing industry. The first theme of the literature review is the transformational leadership theory. I also present a discussion of supporting and opposing leadership theories (social exchange theory and transactional

leadership theory). The third theme includes a discussion on employee engagement in the food manufacturing industry and recent studies in which researchers explored the impact of employee disengagement. The fourth theme is evidence on the effects of employee engagement on business performance. In the last theme of the literature review, I discuss employee engagement and leadership.

The primary research question for this study was: What strategies do food-manufacturing leaders use to engage employees? This review of the professional and academic literature provided me with the foundation for understanding the methods and techniques leaders found effective in engaging employees. I used scholarly sources to support the structure of this study, including peer-reviewed articles from Business Source Complete, Walden University Library, and Google Scholar. These publications were pivotal to the foundation of this research and enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of the effect of leadership on employee engagement.

I selected articles published in or after 2014 to ensure the publications I reviewed were pertinent and recent. Crossref and Ulrich's Periodical Directory were essential tools to confirm the peer-reviewed status of articles I used to support this study. The terms I searched included the *transformational leadership theory*, *fit theory*, *social exchange theory (SET)*, *organizational profitability*, *employee engagement*, and *organizational growth and prosperity*. The entire study contains 220 sources, of which 196 (89%) of the articles were published between 2014 and 2018 in peer-reviewed journals; two (1%) of the peer-reviewed count are dissertations. The remaining 22 (10%) of the sources included peer-reviewed articles published before 2014, non-peer-reviewed articles,

government websites, and books. The literature review included 89 articles published between 2014 and 2018; 80 (89%) of the sources are from peer-reviewed journals, the remaining nine (11%) articles are from non-peer-reviewed journals and books.

### **Transformational Leadership Theory**

Burns published the transformational leadership theory in 1978; his work has received a compelling volume of scrutiny with some researchers saying that transformational leaders deliver absolute organizational change (Herman, Huang, & Lam, 2013; Holten & Brenner, 2015; Resmi, Gemini, Silvian, & Kannan, 2014). Burns (1978) used the transformational leadership theory to illustrate how leaders can stimulate followers to surmount managerial objectives and accomplish a common goal. Researchers continue to use the transformational leadership theory to discern various business experiences such as employee engagement and organizational profitability (Gyensare, Anku-Tsede, Sanda, & Okpoti, 2016; Simmons & Culbertson, 2013). Scholars established that the transformational leadership theory is a broad-spectrum leadership model that is outstanding for exploring organizational phenomena (Paladan, 2015; Stempel, Rigotti, & Mohr, 2015; Thompson & Glasco, 2015). The transformational leadership theory has global acknowledgement in leadership literature and has earned approval from researchers and practitioners (Paladan, 2015). The key constructs or propositions of the transformational leadership theory are: (a) individualized consideration, (b) intellectual stimulation, (c) inspirational motivation, and (d) idealized influence (Burns, 1978).

Transformational leadership is the leadership style most scholars use to explore strategies and communicate clear organizational change (Cailler, 2014). Katsikea, Theodosiou, and Morgan (2015) argued that more researchers favored using the transformational leadership theory above the transactional leadership theory to research organizational phenomena. According to Morgan (2015), transformational leaders were more effective at implementing organizational changes.

The transformational leadership theory is beneficial when studying leadership strategies and behaviors that managers use to alter employees' performance and organizational engagement (Pohler & Schmidt, 2015), job fulfillment and accentuation (Boon, 2015; Sheraz, Wajid, Sajid, Qureshi, & Rizwan, 2014), and debility and mass exodus (Salem, 2015). Transformational leaders guide employees through inspiration, admirable behaviors, and unselfish behavior (Aggarwal & Krishnan, 2013). Other researchers pointed out that the transformational leadership theory refers to transformational leaders as laudable leaders who motivate others through exemplary behaviors and inspiration (Aggarwal & Krishnan, 2013; Holstad, Korek, Rigotti, & Mohr, 2014). The conclusions of Caillier (2014), Holstad et al. (2014), and Aggarwal and Krishnan (2013) are compatible with Burns' (1978) transformational leadership theory.

Transformational leaders promote growth, creativity, autonomy, and maturity, which escalate followers' confidence in the leadership. Aggarwal and Krishnan (2013) found that transformational leadership had a beneficial effect on productivity and employee engagement. In addition, transformational leaders create an operational

environment where workers become more effective by communicating a forcible organizational vision that prompts influential emotions in employees and stimulates their moral beliefs (Holstad et al., 2014). In addition, transformational leaders promoted employees' inner strength by aiding employees' ambition to become valuable members of the organization (Aggarwal & Krishnan, 2013; Karakitapoglu-Aygun & Gumusluoglu, 2013). The outcomes of Karakitapoglu-Aygun and Gumusluoglu's (2013) exploration coincided with the propositions of individualized applications, which Burns (1978) defined as a leader's competence to build a work environment where employees can establish their full potential. Many scholars and practitioners use the transformational leadership theory as a base to explore new insight and exhibit positive and contributory leadership (Northouse, 2013). Leaders use transformational leadership conduct to deliver positive modification and promote positive transformation and innovation (Liu, Jing, & Gao, 2015).

Transformational leaders can change an institution by motivating, upholding, and cultivating employees (Liu et al., 2015; Northouse, 2013). A distinct contrast between transactional and transformational leaders is that transactional leaders use an accolade system to propel followers while transformational leaders influence employees through constant communication, encouragement, and help. Northouse (2013) stated that researchers who strategically use transformational leadership know the four constructs of the transformational leadership theory: (a) individualized consideration, (b) intellectual stimulation, (c) inspirational motivation, and (d) idealized influence. Individualized



consideration invokes leaders' ability to maintain supportive conditions to address the skills and educational needs of all employees (Paladan, 2015).

**Individualized consideration.** Individualized consideration refers to the amount of time leaders are willing to commit to followers' personal and developmental needs including being a mentor or a coach and listening to the concerns of the people they lead (Northouse, 2013). Using individualized consideration helps organizational leaders develop employees' tenacity and identify deficiencies (Paladan, 2015). Leaders can use behaviors correlated with individualized consideration to coach and help employees achieve self-actualization (Northouse, 2013). Burns (1978) found that transformational leaders use individualized consideration when they advise, coach, and mentor their followers, which is essential in helping employees reach their full potential. In addition, demonstrating conducts correlated with individualized consideration give leaders the chance to enhance employees' proficiencies (Burns, 1978).

Simmons and Culbertson (2013) investigated the transformational leadership theory to gain an understanding of how transformational leaders' actions promoted employee citizenship, employees' views of leaders, and collaboration. Several scholars discovered that leaders' behaviors linked with individualized consideration had a comprehensive effect on the organization and promoted employees' citizenship and directness and followers' perceptions of leaders and collaboration. Other scholars researched the relationship between professional growth, organization commitment, and transformational leaders and recommended leaders assign tasks to followers based on their knowledge and skills to bolster professional growth, which in turn increased

employees' organizational commitment and enhanced employee engagement (Hofisi, Hofisi, & Mago, 2014). In alignment with the conclusions of Qiu and Gullett (2017), others scholars stated that leaders who treated subordinates as special individuals encouraged followers' organizational dedication and focus, which in turn lessened disengagement (Gyensare et al., 2016; Pohler & Schmidt, 2015). Leaderships' demeanors related to individualized consideration promote motivation, enhance morale, elevate results, and inspire teamwork, which are critical indicators engagement (Prasannakumar, 2015).

**Intellectual stimulation.** Intellectual stimulation refers to leaders' ability to inspire employees to be innovative and creative by enhancing followers' desires to use critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Haile, 2015). Intellectual stimulation involves arousing followers' thoughts and imagination, as well as stimulating their ability to identify and solve problems creatively (Burch & Guarana, 2014). Transformational leaders are not only fond of giving incentives for time and skill improvement, they promote innovation among those they lead. Additionally, they look for various methods to inspire employees on the importance of creativity (Petrova, Dewing, & Camilleri, 2016).

In their study on transformational leadership, Pohler and Schmidt (2015) sought to understand how leaders can use intellectual stimulation to drive employees' innovation and creativity. The findings revealed that leaders who can inspire followers can create an operational environment that leads to positive outcomes, increased employee satisfaction, reduced employee attrition, and improved employee engagement (Pohler & Schmidt,

2015). Subsequently, Haile (2015) learned that when leaders propelled or persuaded followers, employees accomplished more, which resulted in less disengagement. Other researchers reported findings similar to the findings of Haile (2015), who suggested that when leaders display behaviors associated with intellectual stimulation, workers experience increased job satisfaction, which leads to increased employee engagement (Alsaraireh, Quinn-Griffin, Ziehm, & Fitzpatrick, 2014; Mathieu, Fabi, Lacoursiere, & Raymond, 2015).

Leaders who display behaviors linked to intellectual stimulation promoted personal and professional growth that leads to increased productivity (Mathieu et al., 2015). In addition, using intellectual stimulation behaviors when leading workers provides an opportunity for leaders to develop their followers for future advancement opportunities (Pohler & Schmidt, 2015). Employees with leaders who practice behaviors associated with intellectual stimulation experience a faster developmental growth, which lead to faster promotions within the organization (Alsaraireh et al., 2014). By stimulating followers, leaders create an operating environment where workers had better opportunities for professional growth and advancement (Alsaraireh et al., 2014; Mathieu et al., 2015; Pohler & Schmidt, 2015).

**Inspirational motivation.** Inspirational motivation refers to how leaders can motivate or inspire followers to reach a state of inspiration that increases their level of engagement and willingness to do their best to help the organization succeed (Northouse, 2013). Leaders who effectively inspire followers are able to align employees' values with organizational values (Northouse, 2013). Inspirational leaders express a vision to

subordinates that leads to increased motivation, improved job satisfaction, and amplified willingness to support organizational goals (Patton, 2015). Leaders who display behaviors associated with inspirational motivation such as coaching and supportive leadership influence employees to work with intensity and excitement to achieve the goals of the organization (Petrova, Dewing, & Camilleri, 2016).

Inspirational leaders are effective during organizational crises (Patton, 2015). In stressful situations, inspirational leaders build a strong foundation that promotes team cohesion by providing employees with guidance and continuous inspirational support (Patton, 2015). A few of the behaviors linked with inspirational motivation are active concentration, leadership involvement, apportioning, and contributory leadership (Elo et al., 2014; Paladan, 2015). Some researchers discovered that the conducts connected with inspirational motivation are fundamental for constructing professional liaison between leaders and followers, promoting innovation at the workplace, and increasing employee engagement (Herman et al., 2013; Hoover & Morrow, 2015).

**Idealized influence.** Transformational leaders have the leverage to inspire, prompt, and provoke employees to achieve goals (Holstad et al., 2014; Karakitapoglu-Aygün & Gumusluoglu, 2013). For this reason, transformational leadership is a type of leadership for engaging employees and promoting positive change (Bass, 1985). These leaders create value with others and influence subordinates to become leaders. Leaders use individualized consideration when they recognize subordinates as individuals and boost advancement (Bass, 1985). Transformational leaders become trainers to their

followers by using individualized considerations, so that subordinates can achieve their aspirations (Peters & Halcomb, 2015).

By engaging in behaviors associated with idealized influence, leaders increase employees' organizational commitment (Qiu and Gullett, 2017; Gyensare et al., 2016; Salehzadeh, Shahin, Kazemi, & Shaemi, 2015). Scholars found that transformational leaders' behaviors associated with individualized consideration improve workers' self-esteem, promote self-efficacy, and increase emotional stability (Qiu and Gullett, 2017; Gyensare et al., 2016). Other researchers suggested that transformational leaders gain a significant level of influence over followers as the result of idealized influence (Prasannakumar, 2015). Leaders who use behaviors associated with idealized influence create an operational environment that lead to professional growth by increasing employees' self-confidence (Prasannakumar, 2015). Some scholars also found that behaviors linked to idealized influence increased job satisfaction (Aiswarya & Ramasundaram, 2014; Haile, 2015), while other scholars discovered that increased job satisfaction led to reduced employee disengagement (Alsarairh et al., 2014; Mathieu et al., 2015).

### **Supporting and Opposing Theories and Models**

In addition to the transformational leadership theory, researchers have used several theories to investigate employee engagement. To gain a better understanding of employee engagement, I reviewed supporting and opposing theories (the social exchange theory and the transactional leadership theory). Reviewing recent research on the social

exchange theory and the transactional leadership theory provided me with the foundation for understanding how others researchers have explored employee engagement.

**Social exchange theory (SET).** Thibaut and Kelley (1959) developed the social exchange theory to explain how building relationships with employees helped leaders improve employees' organizational commitment, teamwork, cohesion, and engagement (Kim, 2016). Thibaut and Kelley (1959) suggested that the social exchanges between leaders and followers are critical because such interactions lead to stronger relationship between leaders and follower; when leaders have a strong bond with followers, employee are more willing to support the organizations' vision and mission (Hamon & Bull, 2016).

The social exchange theory is a broad social theory which explain how people formed, maintained, and terminated social relationships (Kim, 2016). Thibaut and Kelley (1959) explained that the basic premise of the social exchange theory is to provide an explanation of how people feel about a given interaction or relationship. Researchers also found that the type of relationship depends fundamentally on what employees perceive (Subba & Rao, 2016; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). More specifically, the perceived costs and benefits that accompany a person's interactions determine how he or she evaluates them (Kim, 2016). Subba and Ra (2016) discovered that when employees perceive rewards are high and costs are low, workers tend to feel good about a relationship and will stay in it. If perceived costs increase, satisfaction in the relationship would decline; and people are more likely to end the relationship (Hamon & Bull, 2016; Kim, 2016).

Social exchanges between leaders and followers are important to followers because communication increases employee alignment to an organization. The

willingness demonstrated by employees is representative of perceived organizational structure and leader-member exchanges (Ahmed, Phulpoto, Umrani, & Abbas, 2015). Leaders who use behaviors associated with the social exchange theory are able to strengthen the relationship between the organization and employees (Slack, Corlett, & Morris, 2015). The social exchange theory requires mutuality between parties. The relationships between followers and leaders who use the social exchange theory are similar to the unity found among subordinates and transformational leaders (Klersch, & Byrne, 2015). Researchers discovered that leaders who display behaviors linked to the social exchange theory promote cohesiveness, teamwork, productivity, and comprehension (Amed et al., 2013; Klersch, & Byrne, 2015). In addition, teamwork and cohesion lead to increased fulfillment and job satisfaction (Slack et al., 2015). The mutual relationship created by leaders who engage in behaviors associated with the social exchange theory lead to increased employee engagement in the organization (Memon, Salleh, Baharom, & Harun 2014; Slack et al., 2015).

Researchers conducted a cost-benefit analysis of the social exchange theory and found that leaders who use the social exchange theory were very effective in creating long-lasting relationships that led to increased employee engagement (Kim, 2016). Since leaders who use behaviors described or identified (you decide) associated with positive outcomes in the social exchange theory create long-term friendship; they also create a productive operational environment by promoting teamwork, cooperation, and cohesion (Hamon & Bull, 2016). Leaders who can create long-lasting relationships with followers

were effective at motivating employees to support the organization's vision, as the result of improved commitment and decreased employee disengagement (Carter, 2016).

Building strong relationships with followers is an important part of any business strategy designed to increase employee engagement (Carter, 2016; Kim, 2016). The social exchange theory helps leaders understand the importance of relationship as a tool to motivate employees and decrease workers' disengagement (Carter, 2016). Leaders who use behaviors associated with the social exchange theory to build relationships with employees, which increased leaders' effectiveness when motivating employees to support organization's goals and objectives (Carter, 2016; Hamon & Bull, 2016; Kim, 2016).

Scholars found that relationships are more effective and productive when the exchanges between people involved in the relationship are equitable (Carter, 2016; Nunkoo, 2016). Equitable or fair exchanges lead to increased commitment and reduced employee disengagement as a result of reduced conflict between leaders and followers (Hall, 2014; Kim, 2016). Leaders who build strong relationships with subordinates are more effective at increasing employee engagement because people are more willing to follow leaders with whom they have a relationship (Hamon & Bull, 2016). Based on the finding of Hall (2014) and Carter (2016), positive social exchanges and effective communication are important strategies leaders use to improve employee commitment, which in turn lead to increased employee commitment and engagement.

**The transactional leadership theory.** Transactional leaders focus on supervision and organizational performance as a way to accomplish the mission; transactional leadership is a style of leadership where leaders engaged in behaviors that



promote compliance by followers through both rewards and punishments (Northouse, 2013). One of the differences between the transactional and transformational leaders is that transactional leaders use rewards to inspire employees while transformational leaders use individualized consideration or motivation to motivate followers (Northouse, 2013). Scholars also referred to transactional leadership as managerial leadership because transactional leaders focus on supervision, organization, and performance; transactional leaders promote compliance from employees by using both rewards and punishments (Rodrigues & Ferreira, 2015; Smith, 2015). Researchers have used the transactional leadership theory to understand how some leaders use rewards to increase workers' achievements and engagement (Arzi & Farahbod, 2014).

Scholars found that transactional leaders have the following transactional behaviors in common: (a) use reward and punishment to motivate subordinates, (b) tend to be direct, (c) expect subordinates to comply with instructions or requirements without question, and (d) like to micromanage employees (Northouse, 2013; Rodrigues & Ferreira, 2015). The literature indicated that transactional leaders are more effective than transformational leaders when operating in an environment where meeting production timelines are essential to an organization (Deichmann & Stam, 2015). Transactional leaders' behaviors motivate employees to improve their performance quickly because of immediate rewards, which help institutions overcome production challenges (Smith, 2015).

While transformational leaders are effective when it come to bringing positive organizational change (Northhouse, 2013; Rodrigues & Ferreira, 2015; Smith, 2015),

other scholars have discovered value in using transactional qualities as a way for leaders to increase organizational performance and reduce employees' disengagement (Ahmad, Abdul-Rahman, & Soon, 2015; Deichmann & Stam, 2015). Rodrigues and Ferreira's (2015) findings were similar to the findings of Ahmad et al. (2015) and Deichmann and Stam (2015); Rodrigues and Ferreira found that transactional leaders were effective and increased employee engagement because some people respond positively to rewards or compensations. In contrast, other researchers discovered that effective leaders tended to use a combination of behaviors associated with both transactional leaders and transformational leaders (Dartey-Baah, 2015; Martin, 2015).

Although transactional leaders are effective in increasing production, engagement, and productivity, the effects of transactional leadership are temporary (Arzi & Farahbod, 2014). The moment that leaders stop providing the incentives or rewards that led to increased productivity or engagement, employee performance and engagement decrease subsequently (Arzi & Farahbod, 2014). Epitropaki and Martin (2014) found that transactional leaders increased the engagement of workers who enjoy recognition, reward, and compensation, but organizations only had a short-term increase of productivity (Dartey-Baah, 2015). Conversely, some employees who work for transactional leaders are unhappy when the organizations' leaders are no longer willing to pay additional incentives or rewards (Martin, 2015). In addition, researchers linked transactional leaders' behaviors with increased employee stress, job dissatisfaction, and burnout, which lead to increased employee disengagement (Bailey, 2014).

## **Leadership and Employee Engagement**

Employee engagement is critical to the success of organizations because increased engagement lead to improved productivity and profitability (Griffin et al., 2015; Oswick, 2015). Saks and Gruman (2014a) found that employee engagement is vital to the survival of organizations; businesses with unengaged employees have a higher rate of failure than organizations with engaged workers. Researchers also discovered that employee engagement is necessary to solidify the value of employees; unengaged workers fail to progress in their careers which lead to increased job dissatisfaction and reduced employee retention (Griffin et al., 2015; Oswick, 2015).

Leaders knew that creating an operational environment that promotes employee engagement lead to process improvements and is fundamentally critical in advancing an organizational performance. Organizational success were more attainable when leaders know how to increase employee engagement (Wray, 2016). Leaders who do not promoted employee engagement have a difficult time achieving and sustaining a competitive advantage (Nair & Salleh, 2015). Increased employee disengagement lead to reduced productivity; which in turn effects profitability and sustainability (Abbas et al., 2014). By promoting employee engagement leaders bring positive organizational changes that lead to improved creativity and increased productivity (Barrick, et al., 2015). Leaders who understand the value that come from engaged employees use this knowledge to implement effective strategies to increase motivation, productivity, and retention.

Creating an operation environment that promotes employee engagement have positive results and lead to increased employees' commitment (Barratt, Ferris, & Lenton, 2015; Sauders & Tiwari, 2014). By understanding the importance of employee engagement, leaders emphasized how valuable workers are to their organizations; which support the achievement of the company's vision and mission (Sauders & Tiwari, 2014). Bhuvanaiah and Raya (2014) found that organizational leaders who create an environment that promote creativity and teamwork helped enhanced attitudes, which in turn increased employee engagement. Initiatives aimed at promoting employee engagement benefit both organizations and employees in any industry.

Employee engagement requires more than just leadership by title; it requires leaders to take an authentic interest in comprehending the requirements of employee engagement (Bolarinwa, 2015). Employees who view their leaders as supportive and reliable have a higher level of organizational commitment than workers who had unreliable and unsupportive leaders (Wang, 2015). Bolarinwa (2015) identified meaningfulness, safety, and availability of resources as the three psychological conditions leaders needed to align to engage employees. Leaders who care about employee engagement, create a safe work environment, and provided the necessary resources to keep employees engaged (Bolarinwa, 2015). Understanding employee engagement is imperative because of the correlation between performance and improved competitiveness (Bolarinwa, 2015).

The role of leadership behaviors in employee engagement needed further studying (Bolarinwa, 2015). Bolarinwa (2015) proposed a conceptual model to understand the

aspects of transactional leadership, the emotional intelligence of leaders, and transformational leadership behaviors to refine employee engagement levels. This model pointed to the importance of leadership behaviors, as contrary to a specific leadership style, when considering employee engagement in the organizational context. Shepperd, Bowes, and Hall (2014) found a correlation between leadership behaviors and employee engagement; the researchers discovered that leaders could influence employee engagement by using leadership behaviors (Shepperd, Bowes, & Hall, 2014).

Scholars discovered that behaviors associated with transformational leadership are best suited to increase an employees' level of engagement in an organization (Blomme, Kodden, & Beasley-Suffolk, 2015; Shepperd, Bowes, & Hall, 2014). Followers perceived transformational leaders as supportive of organizational goals rather than self-centered in the pursuit their self-interests (Alkahtani, 2015; Tse, Huang, & Lam, 2013).

Transformational leadership results in increased employee engagement because of the behaviors associated with transformational leadership: (a) expansive communication, (b) trust and integrity, (c) a rich and involving job, (d) highly effective and supportive direct supervisors, (e) high career advancement opportunities, (f) high contribution to organizational success, (g) high pride in the organization, and (h) supportive colleagues (Zhang, Long, & Zhang, 2015). Transformational leadership behaviors are conducive to higher levels of employee engagement (Bolarinwa, 2015). Ugoami (2016) found a positive relationship exists between transformational leadership and employee engagement on an individual level.

Bolarinwa (2015) found a relationship between leadership behavior and improved employee engagement; the scholars asserted that the engagement process must start with engaged leaders who are aware of the needs and requirements of their followers. Also, leaders must understand how their words and actions affect employees' engagement (Bolarinwa, 2015). Furthermore, increased productivity occurs when leaders provide a work environment that is conducive to employee engagement (Keeble-Ramsay & Armitage, 2014). Sun and Wang (2016) also cautioned that leaders' behaviors are essential; suggesting that there is unique balance between leaders' behaviors and employee engagement. Leadership behaviors do not occur in isolation; they are context dependent (Bolarinwa, 2015). Other researchers emphasized the need for additional research on the relationship between leaders' behaviors and the influence on followers' engagement (Bolarinwa, 2015; Nübold et al., 2013;).

Shukla and Rai (2015) proposed two main models of leadership paths to explain employee engagement, the soft path and the hard path. The soft path refers to engaging in leaders' behaviors that promote a positive workplace environment and enhance a positive relationship between leaders and employees. Conversely, leaders who used a hard path leadership style focus on promoting employees' efforts to increase organizational performance (Shukla & Rai, 2015). Shukla and Rai (2015) studied the two paths by observing a group of organizational leaders who engaged in soft path leadership behaviors and a group of leaders who practiced the hard path approach. Behaviors associated with the soft path approach include promoting effective communication, building healthy leader-employee relationships, and increasing employee engagement.

The scholars found that businesses where leaders engaged in behaviors associated with the hard path approach had increased employee disengagement (Shukla & Rai, 2015). In contrast, organizations with leaders who practiced soft path behaviors were able to increase employees' engagement within their organizations.

Leaders' behaviors have a positive or negative effect on employee engagement (Farrell, 2016). Farrell (2016) found that to promote employee engagement, leaders must care about building healthy relationships with their employees. Leaders who engage in behaviors that promote employee engagement are more effective at reducing employee turnover than leaders who do not encourage employee engagement (Shukla & Rai, 2015). The findings of Farrell (2016) revealed that by engaging in behaviors that promote employee engagement, leaders reduce employee turnover.

Mo and Shi (2017) found that leaders' ethical behaviors affected employees' attitudes; which in turn affected employee engagement and employee turnover. The scholars found a strong relationship between ethical leadership, work engagement, and employees' commitment (Mo & Shi, 2017). A value driven form of leadership such as ethical leadership affects the convictions of followers as well as their motivation, attitudes, and behaviors (Yu-Chi, 2017). By exhibiting positive ethical behaviors, leaders affect employees' attitudes and work behaviors (Mo & Shi, 2017). Yu-Chi's (2017) findings were similar to Mo and Shi's (2017) findings; Yu-Chi's (2017) discovered that by engaging in ethical leadership, leaders increased employees' initiatives. The findings of Yu-Chi's (2017) and Mo and Shi's (2017) revealed that leaders who engaged in behaviors associated with a value-driven form of leadership such as ethical leadership

affects the beliefs of followers as well as their encouragement, perspectives, and behaviors.

Choudhary, Akhtar, and Zaheer (2013) recruited 155 participants from a service sector within Pakistan to examine the correlation between the transformational and servant leadership styles. Servant leadership is a leadership approach leaders practiced to stimulate emotion and employee behaviors in a positive way, while transformational leadership is an inspirational leadership style leaders engaged in to motivate employees to accomplish a common goal (Mishra, Boynton, & Mishra, 2014). Transformational leadership was more effective in increasing learning, which in turn increased organizational performance; making transformational leadership a more effective leadership style for increasing organizational growth (Choudhary et al., 2013). Transformational leaders arise employees' desires to become productive members of their organizations (Choudhary et al., 2013). Leader who inspire workers to be more productive employees are more effective at reducing employee turnover, as the result of increased job satisfaction (Mishra et al., 2014). Mishra et al. (2014) suggested that by increasing job satisfaction and organizational commitment, leaders were able to promote employees' organizational pride. Bates and Weighart (2014) stated that when employees were proud of their organizations, they were less likely to quit their job.

To be successful in any industry, organizational leaders seek ways to increase productivity. Scholars found that employee engagement was an integral part of the success of an organization and lead to increased productivity (Griffin, Bryant, and Koerber, 2015; Oswick, 2015). Griffin et al. (2015) found that employee engagement is



critical to quality service, productivity, and performance. To compete effectively in a competitive marketplace, leaders create an atmosphere to empower employees to fully engage in their jobs (Oswick, 2015).

Employee engagement was becoming a major focus in different organizational settings because of employees are vital to the success of the business (Griffin et al., 2015; Oswick, 2015). Griffin et al. (2015) noted that employees were essential to the continuity of an organization; therefore, it was imperative leaders encouraged employees' involvement in the workplace. Based on the findings of Griffin et al. (2015) and Oswick (2015), organizations depended on employees to be affluent in the industry. One of the most cost-effective ways to promote organizational success is by encouraging employee engagement (Griffin et al., 2015; Oswick, 2015).

Leader recognized how important engaged employees are to organizational success and how critical they are when creating an effective business strategy. Breevaart et al. (2015) suggested that engaged employees put forward more effort toward work because their job have meaning to them. When an employee's job have meaning, the employee experience increased motivation and organizational commitment, which in turn increases employee performance and productivity (Breevaart et al. 2015). Employee engagement affects how fast leaders adopt new organizational processes or implement new changes (Georgalis, Samaratunge, Kimberley, & Lu, 2015; Storch, Makaroff, Pauly, & Newton, 2013).

By promoting employee engagement in the workplace, leaders reduced the level of resistance from employees when implementing new organizational changes. Petrou,

Demerouti, and Schaufeli (2016) found that employee resistance occurs when leaders propose organizational change. Organizational leaders should address resistance promptly to lower the negative impact and avoid the unexpected outcomes that might affect the vision and goals of the organization as the result of employee disengagement (Jones & Van de Ven, 2016). Resistance to change become catastrophic to an organization if leaders do not take appropriate actions to engage employees in finding a solution. Organizational leaders should not ignore the power of resistance because such behaviors lead to employee disengagement. Organizational leaders also lessen the amount of employee resistance during the early stages of changes by engaging employee to be part of the process (Kickert, 2014). Other negative outcomes result from employee resistance to change include decreased organizational commitment, increased job dissatisfaction, and reduced employee retention (Jones & Van de Ven, 2016; Kickert, 2014). Employee resistance may also lead to increased overtime, reduced productivity, and lower profits (Andersson, 2015; Nasomboon, 2014).

Quality leadership is another way to improve and enhance levels of employee engagement (Awasthy, 2015; Strom, Sears, & Kelly, 2014). Researchers discovered that employees' commitment stems from their perception of leaders' integrity within the organization (Kiersch & Byrne, 2015; Strom et al., 2014). Employees care about leaders' honesty; employees consider honesty important because dishonesty affects distribution of rewards in the organization and lead unfair distributive and procedural justice within the organization (Kiersch & Byrne, 2015). Scholars found that leaders' honesty endorses behaviors employees consider fair and impartial (Kopperud, Martinsen, & Humborstad,

2014; Strom et al., 2014). By creating an operating environment that promotes equality, organizational leaders promoted positive behaviors that lead to increased employee engagement.

The ability of business leaders to manage employee engagement is likely to improve performance and increase productivity (Roy, Zvonkovic, Goldberg, Sharp, & LaRossa, 2015). By understanding the importance of employee engagement, business leaders become more effective in helping achieve their organizations' visions and motivating employees to reach their aspirations (Mossar & Allen, 2015). Employee engagement was a new and emerging business initiative, and senior management have listed engagement as a concept that is crucial to business success and sustainability (Bailey, 2014). Organizational leaders must care about employee engagement, ignoring its importance hindered business success.

**Benefits of employee engagement.** There are multiple ways organizations can benefit from increased employee engagement. One of the benefits of increased employee engagement is productivity; businesses with effective employee engagement strategies are more productive than organizations that had non-existent employee engagement strategies (Raj & Zaid, 2014; Vitt, 2014). Employee engagement is an inspirational element that amplifies employee productivity (Vitt, 2014). Raj and Zaid (2014) posited that active discussion and employee engagement promote leader-employee interaction; which leads to an increase in productivity. Leaders must create an environment that promotes employee engagement as a way to inspire employees to participate in the organization's decision-making process and welcome their thoughts and suggestions (Raj

& Zaid, 2014). Overall, team leaders who encourage employee engagement and participation maintain a positive leader-employee relationship; which leads to an increase in employee productivity.

Another benefit of employee engagement is increased employees' organizational commitment (Yu-Chi, 2017). By promoting employee engagement, leaders can inspire employees to become an integral part of the organization as the result of increased engagement (Yu-Chi, 2017). Researchers discovered that increased employee commitment had a positive effect on the organization (Parker, Soomro, & Hayward, 2015; Vitt, 2014). The findings of Parker et al. (2015) and Vitt (2014) reveal that leaders can increase employees' organizational commitment by creating an operational environment that promotes employee engagement.

Another benefit of increased employee engagement is that engaged employees are more satisfied than disengaged employees (Yu-Chi, 2017). Job satisfaction is a predictor of employee turnover and engagement; happy employees are more productive and less likely to quit their jobs (Sauders & Tiwari, 2014). Conversely, unsatisfied workers are uncommitted to the organization because they do not see themselves as part of the team; unhappy employees are less committed and are looking for a way out (Yu-Chi, 2017). Job dissatisfaction has a significant effect on how much effort workers are willing to dedicate to an assigned task; this type of behavior ultimately leads to quitting (Vitt, 2014). By promoting employee engagement, leaders can increase job satisfaction, which in turn leads to increased employee retention (Sauders & Tiwari, 2014; Vitt, 2014; Yu-Chi, 2017).

Another important benefit of increased employee engagement is that organizations with effective engagement strategies are more sustainable than businesses that do not promote employee engagement (Parker et al., 2015). Sustainability is critical to the survival of an organization because business leaders must implement continuous changes to maintain a competitive advantage (Brajer-Marczak, 2014; Parker et al., 2015). Leaders' ability to implement sustainable business practices is essential to the survival of the organization (Zahavi & Simionescu-Panait 2014). The fastest way to success is making sure that leaders commit themselves to promote employee engagement; without the implementation of effective engagement strategies, survivability is uncertain (Brajer-Marczak, 2014).

One of the benefits of employee engagement that leaders should value is teamwork. In a competitive marketplace, organizations need collaboration to find solutions to demanding challenges faced by leaders each day (Brajer-Marczak, 2014). Employee engagement improves teamwork, which promotes innovation and creative thinking (Brajer-Marczak, 2014). By promoting teamwork, leaders can help employees perform their best as the result of increased creativity and innovation (Zahavi & Simionescu-Panait, 2014). When employee engagement increases, workers are more receptive to engaging in new opportunities; such as taking part in process improvements (Brajer-Marczak, 2014; Farrell, 2016).

Employee engagement is one of the cornerstones of organization's success (Brajer-Marczak, 2014). The need for creative thinking and innovation requires employees stay involved and engaged in various work-related activities, teamwork, and

continuous collaboration (Brajer-Marczak, 2014). Employee engagement positively influences performance, well-being, and productivity (Truss et al., 2013). Business leaders who promote employee engagement are able to facilitate active discussions and improve employee morale and satisfaction in the workplace. Since leaders can use employee engagement as a strategy to improve employee morale and satisfaction, creating an environment that promotes employee engagement has a positive effect on organizations because employee engagement leads to increased productivity (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, Debnam, & Johnson, 2014).

**Consequences of employee disengagement.** There are multiple disadvantages resulting from employee disengagement. One of the worse effects of employee disengagement is increased customers' dissatisfaction (Farrell, 2016). Employee discontent doesn't stop at the front lines of business. Employee disengagement leads to customers' dissatisfaction because customers sense and respond to unhappy workers with decreased loyalty (Truss et al., 2013). Since unengaged employees are less effective at providing adequate customers; overtime customers' loyalty to the organization decreases as the result of employee disengagement (Farrell, 2016). Engaged employees are more effective because they are able to create bonds with clients that lead to improved customer loyalty (Farrell, 2016; Truss et al., 2013).

Another disadvantage of employee disengagement is that disengaged workers are less productive than engaged employees (Brajer-Marczak, 2014). Workers who are engaged are more motivated and committed to the organization because of increased job satisfaction; conversely, disengaged workers feel indifferent about their organizations

because of increased job dissatisfaction (Brajer-Marczak, 2014). There is a correction between disengaged workers and reduced productivity; scholars recommend leaders promote employee engagement to eliminate the problem (Farrell, 2016; Truss et al., 2013). Increased employee disengagement is detrimental to the survival of an organization because such practices are unsustainable (Brajer-Marczak, 2014). Since increased employee disengagement leads to decreased productivity, managers must actively promote employee engagement.

Employee disengagement is costly to organizations because it effects organizational leaders' ability to generate value for the stockholders (Vitt, 2014). Scholars found that engaged employees care about the success of their organizations because of their vested interest (Farrell, 2016). Engaged employees look forward to advancement opportunities, while disengaged workers are looking for a way out and do not care if their organizations fail or succeed (Vitt, 2014). Since the purpose of for-profit business leaders is to generate a profit, having employees who are only doing the minimum requirements is not sustainable (Farrell, 2016; Vitt, 2014).

There is an urgency for leaders to identify ways to improve employee commitment and motivation; by increasing employee commitment to the organization, leaders can increase employee engagement, reduce employee turnover, and promote followers' trust in their leaders (Raheim et al., 2016). Trust between leaders and followers is an important predictors of employee engagement (Bengtsson, 2016). When leaders engage in behaviors that promote employee engagement, employees tend to experienced increased motivation, improved corporate culture, increased work-life

balance, and decreased employee turnover intentions (Gordon, Gilley, Avery, Gilley, & Barber, 2014). Trust in leadership also promotes an operating environment that leads to increased job satisfaction, reduced employee disengagement, and increased employee retention (Bengtsson, 2016). Scholars found there is still a need for leaders to identify factors that would improve employee engagement; by increasing employee engagement, leaders can also reduce employee turnover intentions (Bengtsson, 2016; Råheim et al., 2016).

Another consequence of employee disengagement is reduced sustainability. Employee disengagement have led to the failure of many organizations; failure to engage employees effectively is an unsustainable business practice (Vitt, 2014). In a competitive marketplace, leaders need to motivate employees to fully engage in all their tasks to gain a competitive advantage over competitors; employee disengagement leads to lower production, which in turn affects profitability and sustainability (Farrell, 2016). By promoting employee engagement, leaders can increase the chance of survival of their organizations (Farrell, 2016; Vitt, 2014).

One the main causes of lower profitability is employee disengagement (Raj & Zaid, 2014). For-profit organization leaders must ensure their businesses are generating profit to continue receiving support from stockholders; failure to generate profits affects investors' willingness to invest their money in companies that are not generating adequate value (Kickert, 2014). Engaged employees help institutions increase productivity; by promoting employee engagement, leaders can increase productivity



(Kickert, 2014; Raj & Zaid, 2014). Promoting employee engagement is a cost-effective strategy leaders need to implement in their organizations (Kickert, 2014).

Penn (2015) conducted a study to understand how employee disengagement affected economic growth and found an employee disengagement rate was 84% with only 16% of employee fully engaged. Penn (2015) also discovered that estimated economical cost of employee disengagement ranges from \$214.7 to \$287.1 billion each year. Reducing employee disengagement is critical because disengaged employees have a negative effect on economic growth (Gordon et al. (2014). Employee disengagement leads to the failure of businesses, which in turn leads to increased unemployment rates as the result of business closures (Penn, 2015). The findings of Penn (2015) revealed that by increasing employee engagement leaders can increase their survival of their organizations, which promote economic growth.

Another big challenge resulting from increased disengagement is the reduction of employee retention (Brajer-Marczak, 2014). Most leaders might say they need to get rid of unengaged employees, but increased employee turnover is a problem in its own that leaders can reduce by implementing effective employee engagement strategies (Brajer-Marczak, 2014). Employee turnover is costly because leaders have a difficult time managing their organizations with inadequate staff support to perform all business functions (Sauders & Tiwari, 2014). Increased employee disengagement have negative consequences including increased employee turnover, reduced productivity, and decreased customers' loyalty (Brajer-Marczak, 2014; Farrell, 2016). Implementing effective employee engagement strategies is the best way to prevent others organizational

challenges that are detrimental to the survival of most businesses (Sauders & Tiwari, 2014).

### **Transition**

Section 1 includes the problem statement, the purpose statement, and the nature of the study; which I use to defend the reason for choosing a qualitative methodology and case study design for this research. Section 1 also contains the interview questions, the conceptual framework, and the operational definitions. In addition, Section 1 encompasses the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations for the study. The significance of the study and a review of the professional and academic literature are the last two components of Section 1. Section 2 provides a detailed explanation of the chosen research method and design for this study, including my reason for not choosing a different method or design. In addition, Section 2 encompasses my responsibility as the data collection instrument to include my duty during the data collection, organization, and analysis process. In Section 2, I also included a discussion about the importance of reliability and validity in qualitative research. Section 3 will include the presentation of the findings, application to professional practice, and implications for social change. I will also present my recommendations for actions and future research on employee engagement. Section 3 will also include a discussion of my experience as a doctoral student and the conclusions from the data analysis.

## Section 2: The Project

This study was a qualitative single case study in which I explored strategies that leaders in the food-manufacturing industry use to engage employees. This section includes a description of the research methodology and design of the study. The section also includes a restatement of the purpose of the study to emphasize the need for alignment of the methodology with the study purpose. I will provide an overview of my role as the researcher and explain the effective ways of eliminating or minimizing potential biases. I will identify the participants of the study and describe the appropriateness of the research method and design. This section will also provide explanations on the sample population and will address ethical issues. This section will include an explanation of instrumentation, the data collection and analysis process, and the measures for validity and reliability.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies that leaders in the food-manufacturing industry use to engage employees. The population of the study consisted of seven food manufacturing business leaders located in the northeastern region of the United States who have implemented strategies to engage employees. The implications of positive social change include the potential to enhance leaders' understanding of effective strategies to increase employee engagement, which could lead to increasing organizational profitability and growth. Increased organizational profitability and growth can lead to new employment opportunities and promote prosperity for local families and the community.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher in the data collection process was to capture in-depth experiences of the participants through interviews and document findings from focus groups (Snow, 2016). I served as the primary research instrument for data collection and acted as an interviewer and analyst who conducted the interviews to gather relevant information that answers the research questions. I was responsible for conducting an analysis of all collected data.

Having personal relationship with the study participants is an inevitable role of a researcher while collecting data, but detailed information concerning researcher-participant relationships is necessary (Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi & Cheraghi, 2014). According to Nelson, London and Strobel (2015), the researcher should not involve any immediate family member in the process of data collection during a case study in order to avoid bias. This allows the researcher to prevent any potential influence to variables and to ensure the generalizability of results (Sargeant, 2012). For that reason, I chose not to involve any member of my immediate social network (i.e., immediate family, relatives, personal friends, colleagues, or community members).

The three Belmont Report principles a researcher should consider while conducting a study include: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (Fiske & Hauser, 2014). Additionally, the researcher must show respect to participants by allowing them to decide whether to engage in the study (Fiske & Hauser, 2014). I respected all participants' decisions by notifying each participant that participation in this study was voluntary. I protected all participants from any potential dangers associated with the

research (Bouter, 2015). The Belmont Report clearly indicated that the researcher needs to minimize potential harm by maintaining equity in the general population (Bouter, 2015; Fiske & Hauser, 2014). I ensured ethical protection of participants by giving every participant a consent form that contained the terms of participation in the study. I also ensured confidentiality of all participants' identities.

Human nature dictates that anyone is vulnerable to errors and personal biases (Alalfy & Elfattah 2014; Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2013). Bias occurs in the study design, data collection, and data analysis (Alalfy & Elfattah 2014; Applebaum, 2014). Thus, the researcher should reduce the extent of bias by implementing the correct study design and data collection techniques. The researcher should have awareness about the influence of bias in the study's conclusion (Applebaum, 2014).

Bracketing is necessary to maintain the focus of the research and not interject personal opinions into the research process, specifically the data collection and analysis (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013; Wray et al., 2015). To minimize biases during data collection and analysis, I bracketed my experiences and ensured intellectual honesty to maintain the authenticity of the study. Previous experiences, attitudes, and beliefs were set aside to witness the objectives of the study (Tufford & Newman, 2012; Wray et al., 2015). Enumerating personal expectations, points of view, and possible biases in relation to the phenomenon of the study was my focus during data collection. Through these processes, I ensured awareness and cautiousness during data collection and analysis and did not delete or modify any information gathered from the interviews. The researcher should recognize their personal role while conducting the study and alleviate any concern

during the process of collecting data. The researcher should not use his or her personal perspective during data collection (Fusch & Ness, 2015). To avoid introducing personal biases during the interviews and to ensure that I asked participants the same questions, I used an interview protocol.

The use of an interview protocol offered a schematic presentation of topics that guide the researcher would use while conducting interviews. This makes it appropriate for use during interviews (Nelson et al., 2015). The interview protocol outlines the procedure for conducting the interview (Jamshed, 2014). The interview guide was helpful in exploring the questions I asked during the interview. It also helped in ensuring that the interview remained focused on the desired actions (Arena & Uhl-Bien, 2016; Jamshed, 2014). Using an interview protocol enabled me to develop follow-up questions to tease out the needed information. With the familiarity to the phenomenon of engaging employees in the food-manufacturing industry, I followed the interview protocol to uncover more about the participants' views.

### **Participants**

Researchers must carefully consider the participants' experience and knowledge during the participants' selection process to ensure that the participants provide appropriate information about the phenomenon under study (Sargeant, 2012). Sargeant (2012) claimed that in qualitative research, the selection of subjects should be purposeful and involve those who can best inform the research questions of the study. The eligible participants also enhanced the understanding of the research topic (Aguirre & Bolton, 2014; Robinson, 2014). Recruiting eligible participants entails gaining insights about

participants' views, which provides relevant information with regards to the research topics of interest (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg & McKibbon, 2015; Newington & Metcalfe, 2014). The eligible participants were food manufacturing business leaders who were residing and working in the northeastern region of the United States who had worked for at least 8 years, or who are business leaders for at least 3 years, and had no pending resignation filed.

To gain access to the participants, it was essential to contact authorized personnel from the partner organization to request permission (Kondowe & Booyens, 2014; Newington & Metcalfe, 2014). To gain access to potential participants of the study, a researcher must be flexible and adapt to the situations for the best location to find the participants (Sanjari et al., 2014). The researcher also needs to develop a sense of rapport with the people and built a considerate relationship and sense of mutual trust (Råheim et al., 2016).

To gain access to participants of this study, I contacted the COO of the food manufacturing company in the northeastern region of the United States. The COO has possessed relevant information about the participants needed for the study. I obtained permission from the COO before asking members of the organization to participate in the study. After obtaining the permission, I sought approval from the necessary organization to conduct a brief talk during a business meeting. During the meeting, I presented the nature, objectives, and potential benefits of the study to the business leaders. Interested leaders who wanted to participate in the study submitted their business cards or drop them in the designated box before leaving the venue. The interested business leaders

responded to the screening questions which assisted in determining eligibility for the study. The first seven business leaders who were eligible provided their preferred schedule for the interview sessions.

Kondowe and Booyens (2014) explained that effective communication with the participants results in and builds a strong relationship of trust, which makes participants feel part of the research. To ensure effective development of professional relationship with the participants, I asked each leader to sign an informed consent that they received via email. My interaction with the participants, especially during data collection, was formal and comfortable. The development of a personal relationship with the participants was inevitable during data collection. According to Sanjari et al. (2014), the researchers should have an awareness of the impact that may result from questioning the participants. This minimizes harming the human subjects. The researcher should consider the potential effects they may have on participants (Brunero, Jeon, & Foster, 2015; Walton, 2014). I scheduled all interactions through a formal email and no unplanned interactions in the study.

Researchers must carefully consider the participants' experiences and knowledge during the participant selection process to ensure they provide appropriate information about the phenomenon under study (Sargeant, 2012). Sargeant (2012) claimed that in qualitative research, the selection of subjects should be purposeful. Recruiting eligible participants entails evaluating their levels of knowledge to provide relevant information with regard to the research questions (Gentles et al., 2015; Newington & Metcalfe, 2014). The eligible participants were food manufacturing business leaders who resided and



worked in the northeastern region of the United States and had at least 8 years of leadership experience.

### **Research Method and Design**

Selecting an appropriate research methodology and design is essential when conducting research (Park, 2015). I used a qualitative method with a case study design for this study. The goal of qualitative researchers is to interview participants, review documents, and observe behaviors from a targeted population (Katz, 2015). Scholars use a case study design to explore the experiences of a particular person, group, organization, or situation over a period of time to increase their understanding of the factors contributing to the problem (Park, 2015). Selecting a suitable research method and design is an important step when conducting research; the method and design affects what type of conclusions scholars can make about a phenomenon (Yin, 2014).

### **Research Method**

The qualitative research method enables researchers to ask open-ended questions in a manner that allows participants to share their perspectives (Casey et al., 2013). According to Park (2015), qualitative research entails the exploration of research findings and applying the theoretical findings obtained following the research questions that guided the study. Using a qualitative method was most appropriate for my study because it enhanced the use of open-ended questions through which the participants shared their experiences concerning the leadership strategies that managers used to engage their employees. Moreover, using the qualitative methodology allowed for a full exploration of

the perceptions and experiences of individuals within the target population to address the problem of the study within a specific context (Katz, 2015).

A quantitative approach was not appropriate for this study. Quantitative methods are used to focus on findings in a numerical or mathematical form, or to create generalizations from a portion of a target population (Brockington, 2014). Collecting numerical data for statistical analysis were unnecessary (Katz, 2015; Mertens, 2014). Researchers use a mixed-methods approach to answer questions from a quantitative and qualitative perspective (Katz, 2015). Mixed-methods researchers collect, analyze, and interpret quantitative and qualitative data in research studies (Palinkas et al., 2011). The quantitative or mixed method was not appropriate for my study because I did not intend to collect numerical data or generalize from a portion of a target population.

### **Research Design**

A single qualitative case study was the most appropriate design for this study. A single case study was chosen for my study because researchers often use it to explore and distinguish between the phenomenon of the study and its context (Yin, 2014). A qualitative case study is an in-depth exploration, which enables researchers to explore a specific and complex phenomenon within its real-world context (Yin, 2015). In a case study, researchers ask *how* and *why* questions (Aladin, 2017). A single case study was appropriate for this study because I intended to conduct an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences.

I considered other qualitative research designs such as phenomenological research design, ethnographic study, and narrative research design. Wilson (2015) argued that the

phenomenological research design is used to examine live experiences. The phenomenological research design empowers the researcher to allow the participants to provide their views regarding lived experiences. The participants feel committed to explore their real experiences and engage deeply in responding to a particular set of the study under investigation (Padilla-Díaz, 2015). The phenomenological approach was not suitable for my goals for this study.

Bruce, Beuthin, Shields, Molzahn, and Schick-Makaroff (2016) claimed that narrative research design is when the researcher uses visual representation of a group of people. In narrative research design, the researcher explores people's opinions as the sources for empirical knowledge (Bruce et al., 2016). The narrative research design constitutes the formulation of people's stories, and putting those stories into narratives (Shenton, 2015; Treloar, Stone, McMillan, & Flakus, 2015). Narrative research design is the use of two or more case studies with a larger sample size of about 325 participants (Shenton, 2015). A narrative research design is not appropriate for this study because I do not intend to tell a story or present the findings in a chronological form to investigate a particular phenomenon.

Wall (2015) explained that ethnographic research design is the use of reflexive or self-observations on lived-in experiences. The researcher connects theory and practice in order to gain insights on the complexity of the research topic. Awasthi (2015) claimed that in an ethnographic research approach, the researcher explores the study of other group of researchers while gathering information. Ethnographic research design explores the cultural phenomenon where the researcher uses self-observation to make conclusions

on the subject of the study (Reeves et al., 2013; Wall, 2015). An ethnographic study was not suitable because the practices of individuals, organizations, groups, and communities in their natural habitat are not the focus of this study.

In a qualitative study, Fusch and Ness (2015) explained that data saturation refers to the point at which the researcher cannot create more themes or more information from the research questions. This is achieved when there is no additional information to use in developing new categories or when the researcher cannot make any further relationships between the themes or categories (Wall, 2015). To ensure data saturation, I will continue interviewing until no more categories of new themes emerge from the interview responses or when there is no relevant theme emerging.

Saturation concept is a key element to evaluate the sample size during qualitative case studies (Andrew & Henry, 2015; Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2015). The sample size for a qualitative study is a significant component of data saturation, which is the point at which there were no significantly new information gained from the addition of data gathered from a new participant (Walker, 2012). I ensured data saturation by interviewing participants until no new themes emerge.

### **Population and Sampling**

Tourangeau (2014) suggested that in qualitative case studies, researchers take into consideration the population of interest that can explore the operation issues when conducting the study. The population involves individuals who can provide valuable insights on the phenomenon of interest. According to Marshall, Cardon, Poddara, and Fontenot (2013), qualitative researchers should indicate a specific number of samples for

research study. Requirements for establishing sufficient sample size for qualitative research is ambiguous (Elo et al., 2014; Marshall et al., 2013). The sample population I studied will consist of seven business leaders from the food manufacturing industry. Tourangeau (2014) explained samples in qualitative case studies are small size because case studies involve collecting in-depth understanding of the topic and the data analysis is cumbersome.

Purposive sampling is widely applicable in qualitative studies to identify and select information-rich cases related to the topic of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). The purposive sampling involved the identification and selection of individuals of a group of people who were knowledgeable and have experience on the topic of investigation. Thus, recruiting the participants using this purposive is helpful when there is a need to support credibility and conviction in participant selection (Barratt, Ferris, & Lenton, 2015; Robinson, 2014). The use of purposive sampling method provides the researcher with information on whether prospective participants have the appropriate experience to furnish information on the research topic (Barratt et al., 2015; Yin, 2014). I used purposive sampling to recruit the participants which will allow me to produce maximum variations in a small population. I gathered rich data and acquired knowledge to improve the credibility of the study.

According to Davids, Harvey, Halperin, and Chikte (2015), a researcher should test as many participants as the resources allow. A large sample size helps increase the confidence. Marshall et al. (2013) recommended that qualitative studies should utilize a sample size of 15 to 30 interviewees. Yin (2014) claimed that case studies require four to

10 participants to reach data saturation because of the in-depth manner of collecting data. For the purpose of this study, the seven participants who met all criteria participated. Seven business leaders from the food and manufacturing industry located in the northeastern region of the United States provided their views on effective leadership strategies to enhance employee engagement.

### **Ethical Research**

Mann, Savulescu, and Sahakian (2016) stated the objective of obtaining an informed consent are to protect research participants from risks associated with unethical research methods. Informed consent is the approach that researchers utilizes to: (a) give participants information, (b) make sure research participants understand the information given, and (c) make sure research participants participating in the study is on a voluntary basis. Voluntary participation in the research study is critical to information accuracy (McLaughlin & Alfaro-Velcamp, 2015; Radcliffe, 2013). All participants received informed consent prior to beginning their participation in the study so as to inform them of the scope of their participation and their rights as participants. I informed participants that no consequences would result from withdrawing from the study. Participants providing information during the data collection process were able to stop all participation whenever they chose (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2014). When a participant decided to stop participating in the research study, the researcher must bring all correspondences and relation with the participant to an end. Destruction would occur to all collected information (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2014).

Many researchers have offered participants incentives to participate in research studies (Sullivan, Garner, & Dubbert, 2016). Incentives include, vouchers for cash, gift cards monetary items and items of monetary value; however, researchers must make certain that the incentive value does not influence the standard or reliability of the information provided by the participant (Bouter, 2015). Providing an incentive to the participants is a driver for recruiting and can help researchers retrieve enough participants to enhance the reliability and validity of the research findings (Rodgers, Meisel, Wiebe, Crits-Christoph, & Rhodes, 2016). I did not offer any incentive for participation to the participants. Rules, mandates, and ethical requirements existed for protocol to uphold the rights of humans (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). According to Aluwihare-Samaranayake (2012), the objective of an institutional review board (IRB) was to make sure the participants and the researcher have protection and limit harm. The IRB approval # for this study is 04-27-18-0533953. Researchers must provide confidentiality and data honesty throughout the entire research study (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Pollock (2012) claimed that the ethical research underpins the regulatory structures which enable the researcher to conduct the study through ethical approval and protect the ethical nature of micro-ethics based on the researchers' integrity. Klitzman, Kleinert, Rifai-Bashjawish, and Leu (2011) explained that obtaining IRB approval is essential when carrying out research. IRB approval ensures that researchers follow ethical standards and appropriate steps in safeguarding the research subjects. Included in IRB approval was the assurance that all ethical issues were

addressed. Bajaj (2017) claimed that the IRB approval ensures that the study participants understand they are part of the research.

Maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of study subjects and information acquired in the research promote assurance and study integrity (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012). In this study, I informed the business leaders about the project and that their information was confidential throughout the research. I ensured that the identity of all participants remained confidential by deleting identifying information and using pseudonyms.

I kept all physical data related to the study, including interview protocol forms, data sheets, transcripts, invitation letters, and approval forms inside a secure and waterproof locker in my home office. I locked all information received from the research participants in a locker with password protection, including all electronic files. At the conclusion of five years I will destroy all documents and files by burning.

According to Petrova, Dewing, and Camilleri (2016), securing the identity of participants throughout the data collection process, analysis of the data, and sharing information is the premise of confidentiality. It is the responsibility of researchers to ensure confidentiality of recognizable identity data such as participants' names and name of the organizations by coding the data and keeping the data in a secure location (Mitchell & Wellings, 2013). To ensure protection of all recognizable identity data, I coded the name of the organization and the names of all participants. I labeled participants as P1 through P7 and the company as food-manufacturer 1.



### **Data Collection Instruments**

I acted as the main instrument for data collection and analysis and I used a semistructured interview protocol with guide sheets. The interview protocol included the guide questions for data collection. According to Bailey (2014), the interview questions are critical and impact the reliability of the research study. I utilized additional instruments to conduct the study: (a) semistructured interview technique, open-ended questions asked addressing effective strategies leaders used to engage employees, (b) a tape recorder, (c) a pen to document the information provided by the participant, and (d) the interview questions protocol. Bernard (2013) suggested the utilization of a tape recording interviewees during the data collection process captured the information provided by the participant verbatim and improved the accuracy of the data analysis. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), a semistructured interview process enables researchers to receive specific account of participant's experiences. By using the interview protocol, I ensured alignment between the interview questions and research question of the study. The items in the interview protocol were designed to answer the central research question. Using a semistructured interview protocol will allow flexibility in the manner of interviewing, which meant follow-up questions would be asked if they aligned with and are relevant to the questions in the interview guide (Yin, 2014).

According to Fusch and Ness (2015), qualitative researchers should collect and review supporting documents for their study. The data collection process consisted of two phases. During the first phase of the data collection process the face-to-face semistructured interviewing of all participants occurred. Lewis (2015) stated open-ended

questions are crucial in retrieving reliable information during data collection and are adequate in qualitative research. The second phase of the data collection process included the review of documentation supporting the activities and the implemented strategies food-manufacturing leaders used to engage employees. The documents and the activities that demonstrated employee engagement activities and effort served as the secondary data collection source for the study. Yin (2015) suggested that researchers should obtain information from more than one source. The incorporation of supporting documentation as evidence and the record of interviews from leaders that had demonstrated effective leadership strategies supported my research study.

Researchers utilized member checking to increase the validity of a research study (Shenton, 2014). In qualitative research, according to Harper and Cole (2012) member checking enhances the reliability and validity of the research study findings. With member checking, the researcher provides the participants a duplicate of the transcribed information documented from the interview to confirm the content accuracy (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). To further improve the reliability and validity of data collection a panel of experts reviewed the interview questions for the appropriateness of their content in answering the central research question of the study.

### **Data Collection Technique**

Interviewing is the primary data collection technique researchers use for qualitative research data collection. Interviewing participants allows researchers to gain knowledge of the participant experiences (Yin, 2015) According to Houghton et al. (2013), various qualitative research interview styles are available. Semi-structured

interviews were used to obtain information (Houghton et al., 2013). Researchers asked participants specific open-ended questions through this method of interviewing and the participants provided detailed data on the phenomenon through their personal experience (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Yin, 2015).

I asked all participants the open-ended interview questions (Appendix B) in alignment with the overarching research question: What strategies did food-manufacturing leaders used to engage employees? The data collection approach involved semistructured face-to face interviews and open-ended questions. According to Nandi and Platt (2017), using face-to-face questions during an interview provides researchers with an opportunities to ask additional questions and to make observations of the participant facial expressions and body language. There are various methods of interviewing: (a) focus groups, (b) face-to-face, (c) telephone interview, and (d) through email (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014). For this research study, I selected face-to-face interviewing, which was a favorable technique for collecting data. Face-to-face interviewing enables researchers to manage what data the participants revealed (Ziebland & Hunt, 2014). Yin (2015) suggested that interviewing as an appropriate data collection method when conducting a case study.

Some of the advantages of conducting face-to-face interviewing are: (a) there are no major time lapses between question and response in face-to-face interviewing. This advantage is because the response of the participant is immediate, (b) face-to-face interviews allows the researcher to tape record the interview and confirm for accuracy easily, and (c) the ability to observe behaviors and nonverbal actions (Krall, Wamboldt,

& Lohse, 2014). Disadvantages of face-to-face interviewing exist such as: (a) extensive use of time, (b) sample size constraints, and (c) accessibility to supporting documents associated with the research study (Yin, 2015). I asked the food-manufacturing COO and the participant leaders to review documents supporting employee engagement. (Appendix B). According to, Jimenez, Serebrisky, and Mercado (2016), there are disadvantages with evaluating documents because of time-consumption and subjectiveness.

At the end of the interviewing phase of the data collection process, I requested the research participants provide supporting documentation indicating effective leadership strategies that enhanced employee engagement. The reason for reviewing documentation was to have a secondary data source to validate engagement data from the interviews. Reviewing documentation on effective leadership strategies that enhanced employee engagement provided new wisdom to support answering the central research question. The objective of clarifying the data collection technique is to establish credibility of the information (Elo et al., 2014). According to Yin (2015), qualitative researchers must utilize two independent sources of data collection; therefore, I used semistructured face-to-face interviewing and documentation review. These two independent sources further increase credibility and make data saturation achievable in the research study (Yin, 2015).

According to Fusch and Ness (2015), member checking involves participants' review of the initial interpretation of their interviews. In this study, I improved the reliability and validity of data collection by carrying out member checking amongst the participants and reviewed interview transcripts. Member checking affords the participants

the opportunity to confirm accuracy and credibility of data along with reasonable sequence of the analysis and interpretation of the information provided during their interview (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Morse (2015) suggested a 3-step technique to perform member checking: (a) the initial interview, (b) the interpretation of the data the participants provided, and (c) the researcher validating comprehension and interpretation with the participants. Member checking is widely used in qualitative research by researchers' versus transcript review because member checking serves better at reliability and validity (Morse, 2015).

### **Data Organization Technique**

Data organization is one of the core components in the analytical process that supports the researcher in distinguishing the connections among participant responses to research questions (Condie, 2012). The organization of information is crucial while performing research; developing an efficient information goal enables researchers to find necessary data in a timely manner (Gajewski, 2013). I used NVivo as my primary data organization technique to effectively manage all collected data. The data organization techniques include creation of electronic journals, arranging the responses in order of interviews, and storing the data (Haynes, 2013). Reflective journaling is a research writing method researchers use to write about learning experiences (Hermansyah, 2016). When utilized by researchers, reflective journaling inspires and stimulates critical thinking. According to Ruiz-Lopez et al. (2015), scholars recommend reflective journaling because it helps students recognize their own potential and opportunities in

learning. I used reflective journaling, personal log, NVIVO, a labeling process, and a tape recorder.

After transcribing the interview, I gave each participant a copy of the transcription to validate for accuracy. Member checking is a tool researchers use to verify the accuracy of their interpretations of the interviews (Fusch & Ness, 2015). After completing member checking, I inputted the transcription into NVivo software for distinguish coding and themes to gather a concise comprehension of the phenomenon. NVivo is used in qualitative research because of its unique features. The system has character based coding, multimedia functions and rich text capabilities (Zamawe, 2015).

According to Fusch and Ness (2015), it is imperative that all data remains in a secure location and no longer than 5 years. I kept all information relating to the research study in a locked password secure fireproof safe, at my home office. Recent legislation mandated the safekeeping and best practices that ensured information and security measures are taken during and at the conclusion of conducting research (Yin, 2015). It is beneficial for researchers to maintain a master file that distinguishes all information and information locations which will make it easy to get the data (Gajewki, 2013). After 5 years, I will destroy all research information including any personal logs, tape recordings, and electronic files by burning.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis involved three major areas which included the researcher's choices and preferences and their impact on the data that the researcher collected and analyzed, the design and methods used while conducting the research, and the results of the

theoretical interpretation of the analyzed data. Preparation of data for analysis involved two major steps namely transcription of data and preliminary data analysis. Transcription involved preparing researcher-defined columns for notes while preliminary data analysis included checking and tracking data in order to identify the possible results and tracking the direction of the research (Grbich, 2012). The data analysis involved organizing and preparing collected data strategically to assess, analyze and comprehend it. NVivo software was utilized to code the data and determine the themes for the research study (Sotiriadou, Brouwers, & Le, 2014). Interviews, observations, and documentation from within the organization allowed the evolution of themes until no new information appeared and secured data saturation. All of the research themes came from overlapping constructs and conceptualizations I learned during the study.

The first phase included the compilation and sorting of the interview transcripts. During the first stage, I compiled and sort all collected data. The second phase involved breaking down the transcript data into smaller codable fragments to developing coding reliability for interview transcripts. I disseminated the transcript data into smaller fragments and assigned codes during the third stage of disassembling. Disassembling accompanied the assignment of new labels or *codes* to the fragments or pieces, and it requires repeating many times as part of a trial-and-error process of testing the codes (Wutich & Bernard, 2016).). In the third phase, the disassembled data required reorganization into different groupings and sequences using substantive themes (or even codes or clusters of codes) while considering alignment with the conceptual framework of the study (Yin, 2014). The assembling and disassembling (Phases 2 and 3) occur

several times in an iterative manner (Groenland, 2016). The fourth phase involved using the reassembled material to create a new narrative; hence, interpretation occurs in this phase (Wutich & Bernard, 2016). Almutairi, Gardner, and McCarthy (2014) explained that during the reassembling of materials, pattern matching assists in the identification of common terms after the coding process. The identified themes served as the basis of the study after the analysis. After coming up with the interpretations, a conclusion occurs in the fifth phase (Groenland, 2016).

### **Reliability and Validity**

#### **Reliability**

Member checking of a researcher's interpretations contributes to the overall reliability of the findings. Inter-rater reliability the consistency of decisions that result from the involvement of a great deal of subjective judgments that were involved in activities such as recording of observations or categorization of data (Harvey, 2015). I used member checking to ensure the information given during the interviews were authentic by confirming my interpretations of what I comprehended. Reliability were obtained from the accuracy of interview transcripts, theme coding, and remarks (Nandi & Platt, 2017). Researchers account for any personal or research biases that could impact the reliability of the study (Noble & Smith, 2015). Study dependability referred to the stability of the study, where a researcher considered how the information evolved and revisions made throughout the analysis process (Bengtsson, 2016). Detailed and concise documentation were important when establishing reliability (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). According to (Foley & O'Connor, 2013) researchers count on data collection



techniques to determine the reliability such as interview protocols. I used an interview protocol to ensure I were consistent with each participant by following the same roadmap with the exact questions.

To evaluate the reliability of a qualitative research, a researcher assesses the effectiveness of the research with respect to the appropriateness of the research method used (Noble & Smith, 2015). Researchers can improve reliability in qualitative research by dealing with dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability to make sure reliability and validity (Morse, 2015). Fusch and Ness (2015) suggested researchers to address the concerns of dependability.

### **Validity**

In qualitative research, validity involves the integrity of the methods used in the study and the precision at which the study findings reflect the data. The choice of methodology should be appropriate in answering the research questions guiding the study (Leung, 2015). In this study, I will use respondent validation or participant transcript interview. To make sure that data is credible, researchers must align the interview questions with the central research question (Caretta, 2015). Thus, in respondent validation, I invited participants to validate my interpretations of the interviews. I addressed validity by collecting data utilizing the interview protocol process and reviewing material from the participants' organization. I asked the same questions to each participant. Credibility is a counterpart to internal validity (Yin, 2014).

To ensure the transferability of the results, a researcher provides a detailed and accurate discussion and description of the context of the research (Casey et al., 2013).

Therefore, I will provide a detailed documentation of every step and procedure that occurs. Documentation is also important for reliability and is achieved by careful documentation and developing protocols (Seidman, 2015). To ensure transferability, I provided a detailed and accurate descriptions of the context of the research.

Confirmability is the extent at which the results of the study are corroborated by a panel of experts or other researchers. Audit strategy is the key method of establishing confirmability of research (Morse, 2015). When using Audit strategy, researchers follow the natural aspect or progress of events in the project; an Audit strategy enabled researchers to arrive to a conclusion (Morse, 2015). The most useful methods of audit strategy are to use raw data such as audio and video sessions or filed records, thematic summaries, trustworthiness information, or use pilot studies (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Therefore, in this study, I used raw data for confirmability. This involved reviewing the raw data from transcripts to analyze if the interview content reflected the research questions.

Gelb, Bakhtiari, and Walker, (2015) explained that data saturation is achieved with a small sample size of population. A small sample size of population not more than 12 participants will assist in achieving data saturation in a qualitative study. Thus, in the study, I involved a population size of seven business leaders from food and manufacturing industry. This sample size helped in increasing the validity of the results because I was able to conduct in-depth interviews with the seven participants, which is difficult to do with a large sample. Researchers reach data saturation when no new information will emerge from additional data collection (Fusch & Ness, 2015). By

undermining the importance of data saturation, scholars reduce the quality of the research findings (Gibbins, Bhatia, Forbes & Reid, 2014). According to Fusch and Ness (2015), failure to reach data saturation effects content validity. I continued collecting until no new themes emerged from additional interviews and document reviews.

### **Transition and Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies that leaders in the food-manufacturing industry used to engage employees. A case study research design was the best method for this qualitative study. The target population involved food manufacturing business leaders located in the northeastern region of the United States that have implemented strategies to engage employees. The inclusion criteria for the sample of the study were as follows: (a) food manufacturing business leaders, (b) residing and working the northeastern region of the United States, (c) member of the food manufacturing industry for at least 8 years, (d) business leaders for at least 3 years, and (e) no pending resignation filed. Purposive sampling was suitable when selecting the eligible participants for the study. There was a total of seven participants for this study, and the data collection instrument included semistructured face-to-face interviews and document review.

Yin's five-phased analysis for case study assisted in processing the interview data. Section 3 focused on the utilization of the transformational leadership theory, research questions were used as foundation of the study, and how the study would influence organizational business practices. This section encompasses the research findings on the influence of business practices in promoting social change within communities. The last

two parts of section 3 are the recommendation for future research opportunities and a summary and conclusion of the research study.

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

Section 3 contains an introduction of the study and the presentation of the findings. In Section 3, I present the application to professional practice and the implications for social change. I also provide a discussion about recommendations leaders and managers can use to reduce employee disengagement and promote organizational productivity and increase profits. Section 3 also includes recommendations for further research on employee engagement. I conclude with a summary addressing the benefits of applying effective employee engagement strategies to promote organizational productivity and profitability.

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies that leaders in the food-manufacturing industry use to engage employees. I conducted face-to-face semistructured interviews with open-ended questions with seven food manufacturing business leaders who had experience implementing strategies to engage employees. I also reviewed organization's documents, memorandums, flyers, and policy letters. All interviews started with participants reviewing and signing consent forms. Before asking the first question, I took the time to inform participants of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time and that their participation was voluntary.

I conducted all interviews in a private room at the organization. I asked questions previously approved by the IRB to explore strategies that leaders in the food-manufacturing industry used to engage employees. The leaders who participated in this study offered relevant information about strategies they have used to promote employee

engagement. The findings revealed that food-manufacturing leaders were effective at increasing employee engagement by involving employees in the decision-making process, being open to employees' feedback, and promoting teamwork.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

The central research question in this study was the following: What strategies do food-manufacturing leaders use to engage employees? Before starting the interview process, participants signed a consent form; interviewees received a signed copy of the consent form for their personal records. Interviews took place at a private office at the organization. Using semistructured interviews with open-ended questions enabled participants to share their knowledge and experience on strategies they used to promote employee engagement. All interviews lasted between 45 minutes to 1 hour. After completing the interviews, I reviewed organizational documents on employee engagement including memorandums, flyers, and emails.

To protect the identities of all participants, I labeled all participants' transcriptions using a labeling system where P1 meant Participant 1. After transcribing all the interviews, interviewees participated in member checking. The member checking process started with participants receiving a hard copy of the transcriptions, which participants validated for accuracy. Once participants validated the transcriptions, I entered the transcriptions of the interviews into NVivo for coding. I used NVivo to analyze the data more effectively and efficiently. The primary objective of using NVivo was to conduct word frequency searches and determine how often participants used certain words. I used the data obtained from the frequency searches to identify recurring themes participants

shared during the interviews. The themes that emerged from the data analysis were in alignment with the central research question and the conceptual framework. The three themes that emerged from the data analysis were: (a) involving employees in decision-making increased employee engagement, (b) open and honest communication promoted employee engagement, and (c) recognition and compensation increased employee engagement.

In 1978, Burn developed the transformation leadership theory to explain how certain leaders were able to transform an organization by inspiring subordinates to exceed their expectations. Transformational leadership is the leadership style most scholars use to explore strategies and to understand organizational change (Cailler, 2014). Scholars established that the transformational leadership is appropriate for exploring organizational phenomena such as employee engagement (Paladan, 2015; Stempel, Rigotti, & Mohr, 2015; Thompson & Glasco, 2015). The key constructs or propositions of the transformational leadership theory are: (a) individualized consideration, (b) intellectual stimulation, (c) inspirational motivation, and (d) idealized influence (Burns, 1978). I used the transformational leadership theory as the foundation for exploring strategies food-manufacturing leaders use to engage employees.

### **Theme 1: Involving Employees in Decision-Making Increased Employee Engagement**

Involving employees in decision-making increased employee engagement was the first theme that emerged from an in-depth analysis of the participants' responses and organizational documents. Participants (P1, P2, P3, P5, and P7) noticed that involving or

including employees in the decision-making process allowed employees to consider themselves valued members of the organization, which increased employee engagement. P1, P2, and P5 emphasized that subordinates who consider themselves valued members of the team are more willing to engage in additional responsibilities. Leaders who value employees' involvement in the decision-making process are more effective at increasing employee engagement than leaders who make decisions by themselves (P10). P7 stated, "By allowing employees to provide their inputs when leaders need to make an important decision, workers are more willing to accept new changes because they feel it was a team decision and they were part of it." Based on the participants' responses, leaders can involve subordinates in organizational decisions as a strategy to promote an environment where employees feel they are valued members of the organization, which also leads to increased employee engagement.

Based on participants' responses, leaders can promote employee engagement by involving employees in the decision-making process of their organizations (P6). P2 commented, "Leaders who understand the value of involving subordinates in the decision-making process of their departments or organizations create an operating environment where employees are more engaged." According to P7, when employees are part of the decision-making process, they are more committed to making sure their organizations succeed; improved commitment is the result of increased employee engagement. In a company's policy letter addressed to all company's leaders, the chief executive officer (CEO) emphasized, "To be successful as a company we need our employees involved in all organizational decisions; we have many smart people in our



company, and will not be as successful without involving our most valuable resource.”

Cesario and Chambel (2017) found a strong correlation between involving employees in the decision-making process and employee engagement; workers who engaged in their departments’ or teams’ decision-making process experienced a higher level of employee engagement than employees who did not take part in organizational decisions. The findings that involving employees in the decision-making process increased employee engagement were similar to Kuruppuge and Gregar’s (2017). Leaders who involved their employees in their organizations’ decision were effective at promoting employee engagement (Kuruppuge & Gregar, 2017). Leaders should not ignore the positive impact of allowing subordinates to participate in making decisions; the more people who participate in the decision-making process, the more productive a team can be (P6).

Employee involvement in decision-making promotes trust in leadership because subordinates associate their involvement or lack thereof with honesty or dishonesty (P5). P4 mentioned the importance of leaders’ honesty; when leaders make decisions without involving other employees in the decision-making process, workers might perceive that leaders have a second agenda or have something to hide. P6 said, “Leaders who employees perceive as honest increase employees’ organizational commitment and engagement.” Leaders who involve employees in making organizational decisions are more effective at increasing employee engagement than leaders who subordinate perceive as having something to hide (P2). Failure to involve employees in the decision-making process creates an operating environment that fosters distrust in leadership, which

increases employee disengagement (P5). Employees' perceptions of their leaders as it relates to trust have a significant effect on workers' desire to fully engage in their jobs.

Participants stated that one of the benefits of increased employee involvement is an increase in employees' job satisfaction (P3, P6, and P7). P4 commented, "Increasing employees' involvement is important because employee involvement increases employee engagement, which promotes job satisfaction." According to P4 and P6, increased job dissatisfaction leads to a decrease in employee engagement. P8 shared, "The best way I found to improve job satisfaction is by creating an operational environment that promotes employee engagement." In addition to increased job satisfaction, employee involvement leads to an increase in employee engagement (P3 and P5). P7 shared, "I noticed a significant increase in job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employee engagement since I started involving employees to help me find solutions to current problems in my organization." According to the responses from P3, P4, P5, P6, and P7, an increase in job satisfaction leads to increased employee engagement.

Excluding employees from the decision-making process increases turnover intentions (P3 and P5). Employees want to work for companies where they feel they are valued members of the organization; excluding them from the decision-making process does the opposite of that (P2). P1 shared, "In general, most people want to contribute to their organizations; when they feel, they are valued members of a team, they are more engaged and less likely to quit their jobs." P4 said, "I left my previous job because I felt leaders did not value anything subordinates had to say; no one wants to work in an environment where they feel worthless." According to P2 and P7, employee involvement

increases employee engagement and reduces turnover intentions. Leaders can improve employee retention and promote employee engagement by creating an operating environment where subordinates are an essential part of the decision-making process.

**Correlation to the conceptual framework.** The findings that involving employees in the decision making-making increased employee engagement were similar to the findings of Burns (1978) to explain the transformational leadership theory. According to Burns (1978), transformational leaders promote intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealize influence, which are important ways leaders can increase employees' performance and promote a sense of identity and teamwork. Promoting intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation has a positive effect on employee engagement because transformational leaders can inspire followers to be productive members of their organizations (Burn, 1978). Leaders who involve employees in the decision-making process can improve employee engagement because workers feel that they are valuable members of the organization. By promoting employee engagement, leaders have a positive effect on organizational success because they help followers reach their full potential through continuous leadership (Burns, 1978). Cesario and Chambel (2017) found that by involving employees in the decision-making process, leaders increased employees' performance, promoted organizational commitment, and reduced employee disengagement. Leaders who involve their employees in their organizations' decision are effective at promoting employee engagement (Kuruppuge & Gregar, 2017). Because employee involvement has a positive effect on employee

engagement, which leads to increased performance and profitability, leaders might be able to gain a competitive edge by promoting employee involvement.

## **Theme 2: Open and Honest Communication Promoted Employee Engagement**

Open and honest communication promoted employee engagement was the second theme that emerged from analyzing the participants' responses. Five of the seven (P1, P3, P5, P6, and P7) leaders identified open and honest communication as an effective way to promote employee engagement. Direct dialogue, transparency, and honest discussions create an operational environment that promotes employee engagement. Participants shared that leaders who engage in open and honest communication inspire employees to become engaged in company strategies. P3 noted, "Open and honest communication is a blueprint leaders can use to encourage employees to articulate their views, suggestions, and thoughts to managers when relaying critical information about procedures and policies." Leaders and followers need to use open and honest communication (P3). According to a few of the participants (P2, P4, and P6), managers who use open and honest communication increase employee engagement. P2 noted, "I do not approach employees as a know-it-all individual, but as a person seeking knowledge by being honest and open with my team members." P4 shared, "I use brainstorming at the beginning stage of a project to gain buy-in and foster employee engagement, demonstrating open and honest communication early in the process."

Open and honest communication is an effective strategy leaders can use to promote employee commitment (P2, P4, P5, and P7). Engaging in open and honest communication creates an operating environment of transparency, which leads to

improved employee commitment (P1). Another participant (P4), accredited open and honest communication as an effective strategy for promoting employee commitment. P1 noted, “Most leaders in our organization welcome and emphasize the importance of open and honest communication; enabling employees to express their ideas and concerns with their colleagues has a positive effect on employees’ willingness to commit to their organizations.” In the company’s open-door policy letter, the CEO wrote, “Our leaders need to be open and honest when communicating with our employees; that is how we promote employee commitment to our organization.” P7 stated, “Open and honest communication is essential because leaders who promote openness and honesty are effective at increasing employee commitment.” Increasing employee commitment is an important strategy because committed employees create an operating environment that enhances employee relations and team building. All the participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, and P7) stressed the importance of open and honest communication as a strategy to increase employees’ organizational commitment.

Leaders who engage in open and honest communication have a positive effect on employees’ morale (P2, P3, P4, P6, and P7). Improving employee morale leads to increased productivity, commitment, and employee engagement (P2). Leaders who are effective at improving employee morale can help their organizations achieve its missions because workers with high morale are more productive than workers with low morale (P6). The CEO shared in the company’s open doors policy letter, “The best way to improve employees’ morale is by informing them that we have an open-door policy and they can come and talk to our leaders about any concerns they might have.” P3 shared,

“Employees’ morale has a significant impact on leaders’ ability to accomplish their organizations’ missions.” Other scholars’ findings were similar to the findings that open and honest communication increased employee morale, Shaban, Al-Zubi, Ali, and Alqotaish (2017) found that leaders were able to improve employee morale by engaging in open and honest communication. Open and honest communication is an effective strategy to improve employee morale and promote employee engagement (Decker, 2016). By engaging in open and honest communication leaders might promote employee morale as the result of increased employee engagement.

Leaders who engage in open and honest communication promote professional growth (P1 and P6). Li, Grupta, Loon, and Casmir (2016) found that leaders who engage in open and honest communication create a work environment where employees reach self-fulfillment because open communications lead to professional growth. P2 stated, “Leaders who practice open and honest communication are more effective at developing employees than leaders who do not engage in open and honest communication.” P6 said, “By engaging in open and honest communication, leaders can create an environment where employees are not afraid to ask questions, which leads to professional growth.” The findings that open and honest communication promoted professional growth were similar to Schaubroeck, Lam, and Peng’s (2016), who found that leaders who engage in open and honest communication were effective at developing their followers.

**Correlation to the conceptual framework.** Burns (1978) suggested that transformational leaders create an operating environment that inspires employees to go beyond their personal interest and place company goals before their own. The finding that

open and honest communication promoted employee engagement is in alignment with Burns' (1978) transformational leadership theory; Burns found that transformational leaders' effective communication skills enable them to inspire others to commit to their organization's mission and vision. Burns also found that followers of transformational leaders were fully engaged in their organizations, in a similar manner as leaders who engage in open and honest communication increase employee engagement. I reviewed a company's policy where the (CEO) emphasized the importance for leaders to practice open and honest communication. The CEO stated, "Leaders at our organization should never overlook the importance of using open and honest communication with our employees; an open-door policy permits employees and allows employees to share their concerns with their supervisors at all levels." Raheim et al. (2016) discovered that transformational leaders were effective at promoting employee engagement, as the result of increased organizational commitment and productivity. By engaging in open and honest communication, leaders can reduce uncertainty, promote organizational commitment, and increase employee engagement (Schmitt et al., 2016).

### **Theme 3: Recognition and Compensation Increased Employee Engagement**

Recognition and compensation increased employee engagement was the third theme that emerged from analyzing the interview responses from participants. During the interview process, all leaders mentioned that recognition and compensation affected employee motivation (P1, P2, P4, P6, and P7). A fundamental practice leaders need to use to promote employee engagement is the implementation of effective recognition and compensation programs (Danish, Saeed, Mehreen, & Shahid, 2014). By recognizing and

acknowledging employees' contributions to the organization, leaders can promote employee engagement, which leads to increased productivity and the achievement of organizational goals (P3, P5, and P6). Participants shared that compensating workers competitively for their contributions effected organizational performance and promoted consistent and positive business results. P1, P3, and P5 disclosed that by recognizing and acknowledging employees, leaders increase their eagerness to exceed company objectives. P6 stated, "Recognizing employee in front of their peers for their contributions create opportunities for leaders to promote employee engagement, which leads to positive outcomes."

Some participants stated that by implementing a bonus plan leaders can increase employee performance; a bonus plan effects the level of initiative workers are willing to take to empower their team members to reach or exceed production goals (P1 and P7). P1 noted, "My team members are constantly talking about how close our team is to achieving our quarterly goals; they even talk about how much their bonus is going to be for reaching production goals." According to P3, having a quarterly bonus to reward employees for reaching organizational production goals (regardless of individual contribution) promotes employee engagement by increasing the level of initiative employees are willing to take. P5 shared, "Most employees are willing to take initiatives to ensure their teams are successful when there is a financial reward; once workers get used to getting their quarterly bonuses, they work harder to earn it every quarter." In the words of P3, the bonus structure for the company helped promote the importance of acknowledging employees' contributions to the overall success of the organization.



Workers are willing to take more initiatives when they know they will receive financial compensation for their contributions (P4 and P6). Recent study findings revealed the positive effect bonuses can have on employees' performance (Tan, 2016). Tan (2016) found a positive correlation between the level of initiative employees took to help meet their organizations' production goals. Cho and Lee (2017) also discovered that by offering employees bonuses for reaching production goals leaders created an operating environment where workers were willing to take more initiatives.

Competitive compensation promotes the retention of top performers (P1, P2, P4, and P6). P3 said, "Top performers are motivated by recognition and compensation; they will find another employer when compensation is not equal to their performance." P1, P5, and P7 offered similar viewpoints on the importance of recognition and adequate compensation as a strategy to retain top performers. P3 mentioned, "In the food-manufacturing industry, organizations need top performers to meet production goals; top performers help create an operating environment that leads to increased employee engagement." When organizations fail to compensate high performers adequately, they quit their jobs and take their skills and knowledge to another company where they receive adequate compensation (P1, P5, and P7). P4 shared, "High performers are always looking for better job opportunities; they know their skills will make a difference wherever they go." Companies with inadequate compensation have a difficult time retaining high-quality employee (P4 and P6). Leaders can help their organizations achieve its production goals by increasing the retention of top performers (P5).

Participants acknowledged that offering a competitive benefits package is an indicator of how effective organizational leaders are as it relates to employee retention and achieving production goals (P1, P4, and P6). I reviewed organizational memorandums and policy letters and found a memorandum that addressed the importance of competitive compensation. A statement from the memorandum said, “Leaders needs to make an effort to get to know their team members and make sure top performers do not leave us because of inadequate compensation.” Companies that offer adequate health benefits, vacation, and 401k match program are effective at promoting employee engagement because competitive employee compensation encourages top candidates to apply for open positions. Another statement from the memorandum about the importance of employee retention said, “Leaders are encouraged to talk to HR to ensure we do not lose an employee who might deserve better compensation based on their contribution to the organization.” Based on one of the organizational memorandums about employee performance which had information about incentives employees and teams received for reaching or exceeding production goals, leaders at this organization promoted employee performance by using incentives; which supported the information participants shared during the interviews. Darmaand and Supriyanto (2017) found that offering competitive compensation increased the retention of top performers, increased productivity, and led to a more engaged workforce. Organizations that offered competitive compensations had a more engaged workforce than organizations that offers below-average benefits (Machek, 2017).

**Correlation to the conceptual framework.** Burns (1978) proposed that transformational leaders' main objectives were the accomplishment of the organization's goals and its mission. Although Burns (1978) did not mention that transformational leaders promoted recognition and competitive compensation, I suggest that leaders who care about the achievement of the organization's mission, vision, and goals would care about compensating those employees who are contributing to the company's success. While exploring transformational leaders' qualities, Gilbert and Kelloway (2018) found that transformational leaders created an operating environment where employees received reward and compensation adequate to their performance and their achievement of organizational goals. The finding of Gilbert and Kelloway's (2018) supported the findings that recognition and compensation promoted an environment that led to increased employee engagement. Teger (2017) examined the relationship between transformational leaders, employee engagement, competitive compensation, and productivity; they found that competitive compensation moderated the relationship between employee engagement and productivity. Teger (2017) also confirmed that transformational leaders promoted employee engagement by offering workers competitive compensation and rewarding top performers.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

Since employee disengagement adversely affects productivity, promoting employee engagement leads to increased productivity, which is essential to the survival of food manufacturing companies (Farrell, 2016). Employee disengagement leads to reduced productivity, which weakens the overall organization's survivability strategy

(Brajer-Marczak, 2014). Food manufacturing leaders must take an active role in managing employee engagement; employees disengagement leads to reduced productivity and organizational failure (Griffin et al., 2015; Oswick, 2015). Implementing effective employee engagement strategies helps help food manufacturing leaders promote corporate growth and productivity, which improves the chances of survivability for their businesses (Farrell, 2016). By increasing employee engagement, food manufacturing leaders could increase productivity, which in turn leads to increased profitability as the result of improved performance and organizational commitment.

By increasing employee engagement, food manufacturing leaders can help their organizations compete more effective against competitors (Griffin et al., 2015). Although most food manufacturing leaders are aware that employee disengagement has adverse effects on their organizations, they can still benefit by getting new insight on strategies other leaders found effective in promoting employee engagement. While there are numerous strategies leaders use to increase employee engagement, participants shared that food manufacturing leaders could increase employee engagement by involving employees in their organization's decision-making process, engaging in open and honest communication, and by promoting teamwork. Understanding the benefits associated with the implementation of effective employee engagement strategies is vital in the food manufacturing industry. More importantly, food manufacturing leaders can use the findings of this study to gain new insight, which might be beneficial in the implementation of future employee engagement strategies.

The information provided by research participants might provide food manufacturing leaders, researchers, and other business professionals with valuable information they can use to increase employee engagement at their organizations. Furthermore, the strategies shared food manufacturing leaders (participants) are a low-cost approach to increase productivity and improve survivability. Employee engagement is critical to the survival of food manufacturing organizations (Nair & Salleh, 2015), which is another reason I recommend leaders consider implementing effective strategies to increase employee engagement. The findings from this study might provide food manufacturing leaders with new insight and provide new knowledge on some effective strategies to increase employee engagement.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The primary objective of this research was to explore strategies that leaders in the food-manufacturing industry use to engage employees. This single qualitative case study on employee engagement is significant to social change because actively engaged employees promote increased productivity and profitability. By implementing effective employee engagement strategies, food-manufacturing leaders can lower the expenses associated with production, which can enable leaders to compete more effectively against other competitors. Improved production leads to increase profitability. When food-manufacturing organizations are profitable, leaders can develop expansion strategies to better position their organizations against competitors, which in turn leads to new employment opportunities and economic growth.

Employee disengagement has an adverse effect on the organization (Griffin et al., 2015; Oswick, 2015). Food-manufacturing leaders can gain new insight from the findings in this study to help reduce the effects associated with increased engagement. By implementing effective employee engagement strategies such as involving employees in the decision-making process and using straight-forward communication, and promoting teamwork, leaders can increase employee engagement at their organizations. Leaders who are effective at promoting employee engagement can help achieve their organization's goals and bringing positive social change to the communities they serve (Nair & Salleh, 2015). The findings of this study indicate that leaders who are effective at promoting employee engagement can help create economic growth, which can reduce unemployment as the result of increased profitability and organizational expansion.

By understanding gaining new insight on effective employee engagement strategies, food-manufacturing leaders may impact individuals, communities, and society. Increasing employee engagement enable leaders to increase productivity and profitability and bring positive social change to their communities (Oswick, 2015). The findings of this study indicated that food-manufacturing leaders can increase employee engagement by involving employees in the decision-making process, using straight-forward communication, and promoting teamwork, which can lead to increased productivity, profitability, and economic growth.

### **Recommendations for Action**

The information obtained from the participants' responses during the interviews might lead to new insight food-manufacturing leaders can use to promote employee

engagement. Since increased employee disengagement affects productivity and profitability, it is critical that food manufacturing leaders understand the benefits associated with the implementation of effective employee engagement strategies. I recommend that promote employee engagement by involving employees in the decision-making process, being receptive to feedback from employees, and by promoting teamwork. Involving employees in the decision-making process, being open to employees' feedback, and promoting teamwork are inexpensive strategies most food-manufacturing' leaders can implement and require limited resources.

Failure to implement effective employee engagement strategies is unsustainable and might have an adverse effect on productivity, profitability, and survivability. In addition, the knowledge shared by participants may help contribute to increased employee engagement, which in term might increase productivity and profitability. By increasing employee engagement, food-manufacturing leaders can promote productivity, organizational growth, and sustainability. Moreover, the successful implementation of effective employee engagement strategies might help leaders create an operating environment where employees are happier as the result of increased employee engagement.

To help increase the distribution of the findings of this study, I will disseminate this research through digital distribution and conferences. Also, I will provide readers from the partner organization and all participants a two-page summary of the findings. Participants and leaders from the partner organization can distribute the two-page summary among peers and other food-manufacturing leaders. Scholars and other food-

manufacturing leaders can access this study through ProQuest/UMI dissertation database. I will also look for additional opportunities to share the findings of this study with business related forums, organizational training, and leadership conferences.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The purpose of this study was to explore strategies that leaders in the food-manufacturing industry use to engage employees in New Jersey. Although many variables might affect employee engagements, the information shared by participants during the interviews comes from participants' personal experiences. Because employee engagement is critical to the success of an organization, future qualitative researchers should explore effective strategies by interviewing subordinates and understanding what strategies they perceive as effective. Gathering data from employees who are not in leadership positions might help researchers understand employees' perceptions of effective strategies and might provide valuable insight on this topic. I also recommend researchers also explore effective strategies in different geographical locations and different food manufacturing companies. By expanding research to other geographic locations, researchers might help leaders better understand effective strategies to promote employee engagement.

Quantitative scholars should examine the relationship between employee engagement and other variables such as leadership styles, performance reward programs, performance-reward bonuses, advancement opportunity, employees' compensation, and organizations' developmental programs. Examining the relationship between different variables might provide leaders with new knowledge to reduce employee disengagement,



which in turn might to increase profitability and improve sustainability. Also, additional research might provide new insights on the limited scholarly knowledge and understanding of effective strategies food-manufacturers' leaders use to promote employee engagement.

### **Reflections**

As a full -time manager, working in a complex operating environment daily, the doctoral study journey and the Walden research approval process were challenging. In addition, equipping myself with valuable information to improve my understanding of scholarly writing and the doctoral study process was more difficult than what I had anticipated. The most demanding part of the research process was time management. During the doctoral study process, I changed jobs twice, moved to different states, and commuted 1200 miles weekly. Another challenge was the removal of bias during the data collection phase. The reason why removing bias was difficult is because I am a leader in the food manufacturing industry. Having to meet with participants and interview them on a subject that I am familiar with was a unique experience. I had to stay alert and understand that the data collection process was not about me; I did not want to display any body language that could have persuaded the participants' view or openness. Overcoming these obstacles was the most challenging part of the journey.

The lessons learned throughout the DBA program allowed me to acquire new insight on effective leadership strategies for engaging employees that I plan to implement to increase employee engagement. Due to my own experiences in the food-manufacturing industry, I was aware that leaders and leadership approach impacted employee

engagement. I found the interview process to be an excellent way for researchers to obtain valuable information to help answer the central research question. The findings from this study have provided me the footprint to drive effective leadership strategies to increase employee engagement at my organization.

### **Conclusion**

Previous researchers explored effective strategies to improve employee engagement and found that employee engagement is critical to the success of organizations because increased engagement leads to improved productivity and profitability (Griffin et al., 2015; Oswick, 2015). Leaders who do not promote employee engagement have a difficult time achieving and sustaining a competitive advantage (Nair & Salleh, 2015). The best way to gain a competitive edge against the competition is by promoting employee engagement; engaged employees are happier and more productive than unengaged employees (Yu-Chi, 2017). The findings from this case study revealed that food manufacturing leaders could increase employee engagement by involving employees in their organization's decision-making process, engaging in open and honest communication, and offering recognition and competitive compensation. Based on the information shared by the participants, food manufacturing leaders should implement the above strategies into the overall organization's strategy as a way to increase employee engagement. Based on the findings of this study, I recommend that food manufacturing leaders promote employee engagement as a strategy to increase employee commitment, job satisfaction, and productivity. Since the implementation of the strategies shared by participants is an inexpensive approach that might yield many benefits, food

manufacturing leaders should consider integrating these recommendations into their organization employee engagement strategy. I also recommend that food manufacturing leaders, scholars, and practitioners use the findings and recommendations of this study to improve their knowledge of the benefits associated with employee engagements and as a way to improve business practices.

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## Appendix A: Letter of Cooperation

[date]

Potential Organization,

I am a doctor of business administration (DBA) student at Walden University. One of the requirements of the doctoral program at Walden University is completing a research that addresses a current business program. I am conducting my doctoral study on the topic “Leadership Strategies for Enhancing Employee Engagement” I consider this study important because employee engagement impacts profitability and sustainability, which are important to the success of food-manufacturing organizations.

I kindly request your permission to interview managers at your organization to gather information that will help me understand effective strategies to enhance employee engagement. To complete my study, I must interview managers and review employee engagement documents. I plan to start the data collection process between 30-60 days. As a researcher, I am responsible for ensuring that the data I collect does not affect the organization or the research participants. Since my objective is to explore the business problem (employee turnover), I will not mention the names of the store and the names of participants in my findings because it is a violation of ethical research and Walden University’s policies. All information collected will be strictly confidential and purely for academic purposes. I hope my findings might help food-manufacturing managers with the implementation of effective retention strategies. I will be happy to share my findings with your organization. Feel free to contact me if you would like more information. I can also provide contact information for my school if necessary.

I would like to thank you in advance for your support. I look forward to your favorable response.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Ada Bradley

DBA Candidate

Walden University

## Appendix B: Interview Protocol

**Interview:** Exploring effective strategies to increase employee engagement

A. The interview session will begin with salutations, personal introductions, and an overview of the research topic.

B. I will thank participants for volunteering to participate in the study

C. Participants will have another opportunity to read the consent form and ask any questions before signing the consent form.

D. I will give participants a copy of the consent form for their personal records.

E. I will ensure the primary and alternate audio recorders are turned on, and I will note the date, time, and location of the interview.

F. I will code participant's identifiable information; I will use "Participant 1 through 10" for sequential interpretation of the interviews.

G. I will document on the audio recorder that the participants sign a copy of the consent form and the interview will begin.

H. The interview will last approximately 30-40 minutes for responses to the seven interview questions, including any additional follow-up questions.

I. When the interview is complete, I will remind participants that I will meet them at a later date to verify the interpretations for errors.

J. At the end of the interview, I will thank the research participant for taking the time to participate in the study.