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Leadership Strategies to Increase Employee Engagement

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2018

Abstract

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by

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BS, Texas A&M University, 2000

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Sixty-five percent of small business leaders indicated a lack of workforce engagement practices as an administrative strategy to mitigate the adverse effects of employee disengagement. Guided by Weber’s organizational theory, the purpose of this multiple case study was to explore strategies some leaders used to increase employee engagement. Five small business leaders in the southwestern United States participated in semistructured interviews. The participants employed successful strategies to increase employee engagement. Data collection included the review of company documents, face-to-face interviews, and member checking to explore successful strategies to increase employee engagement. Data analysis included coding and organizing data and information according to Yin’s 5-step process. Using topic coding, data were arranged into nodes grounded in the context of organizational theory. The study results revealed 3 principal themes: effective and honest communication, supportive leadership behavior, and implementation of employee engagement practices into the business culture and practices. The implications of this study for positive social change include that leaders can apply employee engagement strategies for emerging leaders and develop mentoring and leadership opportunities and programs to maximize the sustainability of the organization.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Employee engagement is a growing phenomenon in business. Disengaged employees are affecting business through a decrease in productivity (Anitha, 2014; Shuck & Reio, 2014). Results of a recent study by Silva (2014) indicated that 13% of employees are engaged in their work worldwide. There are a few barriers small business leaders encounter maintaining a competitive edge (Anitha, 2014). One of those barriers is finding successful strategies to engage and retain employees (Shuck & Reio, 2014).

Background of the Problem

Weak employee engagement strategies affect organizations with significant employee turnover rates, a decrease in production, and a reduction in product quality (Silva, 2014). A business' success has a direct correlation to the expertise of the leader and his or her ability to effectively lead staff (Mishra, Boynton, & Mishra, 2014). The issue is finding the right employee engagement strategies that leaders can implement to engage employees. For an organization to be successful, organizational leaders must be competent and capable (Mishra et al., 2014). Leadership is a relationship between the leader and employee to accomplish similar tasks and goals (Silva, 2014).

Leadership is a significant factor that affects job satisfaction, employee engagement, and organizational commitment (Jena, Pradhan, & Panigrahy, 2017). Employee engagement is a critical success factor for management and organizations. Ethical, moral, and personable leaders encourage their employees to model those same values (Sadeghi & Pihie, 2012). Silva (2014) stated that past research data indicate a direct connection between leadership and employee engagement. Leadership's ability to establish successful employee engagement strategies will help ensure organizational success (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017).

Problem Statement

Leadership has a direct effect on employee performance and engagement (Jena et al., 2017). Businesses lose approximately $300 billion per year due to disengaged employees (Valentin, Valentin & Nafukho, 2015). The general business problem is that unengaged employees affect small businesses profitability. The specific business problem is that some small business leaders lack the necessary strategies to increase employee engagement.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies small business leaders use to increase employee engagement. The targeted population for this study included five leaders of four small businesses in the southwestern United States, who have successfully used leadership strategies to increase employee engagement. The data from this study may contribute to positive social change with small business sustainability that fosters prosperity of employees, employees' families, and communities. By creating a work environment that fosters employee engagement, small business leaders may also contribute to social change through an employee's improved home life and emotional well-being.

Nature of the Study

I used a qualitative method for this study. Researchers use the qualitative method to capture the holistic and real-world perspective regarding the phenomenon (Yin, 2014).

The qualitative method was most appropriate for this study, as using the qualitative method allowed me to identify the cognitive views and interpersonal perspectives of the leaders. Researchers using the quantitative method test hypotheses and analyze statistical data (Willgens et al., 2016). The purpose of a quantitative study is to test a hypothesis or analyze statistical data (Baskarada, 2014; Raheim et al., 2016). Because the focus of this study was on exploring a phenomenon to gain insight through a leader's personal experiences, the quantitative method was inappropriate. A mixed method researcher integrates both quantitative and qualitative methods (Willgens et al., 2016), and using the mixed method can provide complementary interpretations or for expanding on a past theory (Baskarada, 2014). Thus, mixed method was inappropriate, as the focus of this study was on exploring strategies through analysis of the phenomenon using inductive reasoning.

I used a multiple case study design for this study. The overarching research question asks *how* or *what*, and the case study design is structured so that the researcher will have no control over behavioral events (Yin, 2014); thus, a case study design was most appropriate for this study. A researcher using the ethnographic design focuses on the significance of an issue through direct field study where the researcher becomes a part of the culture he or she studies (Baskarada, 2014), which was not the primary goal of this study. A researcher using the phenomenological design attempts to understand how one or more individuals understand experiencing a phenomenon (Baskarada, 2014), which was not the intent of this study. A researcher using grounded theory focuses on an individual's lived experiences or world-views to develop a theory (Willgens et al., 2016), which was not the goal of this study. A researcher using narrative design focuses on collecting individuals' stories on a phenomenon and then placing them in chronological order for drawing conclusions (Yin, 2014). Researchers use case study designs to gain in-depth analysis of the population and ask exploratory questions (Baskarada, 2014). Since the focus of this study was on strategies small business leaders use to motivate employees and increase employee engagement, a case study design was most appropriate.

Research Question

The overarching research question for this study was what strategies do small business leaders use to increase employee engagement?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies do you use to increase employee engagement?
2. What are the main challenges in implementing strategies for increasing employee engagement?
3. How did you address the challenges to implementing the strategies for increasing employee engagement?
4. What positive organizational changes have you seen from increased employee engagement?
5. How did other organizational leaders contribute to implementing the strategies for increasing employee engagement?
6. What else would you like to share regarding employee engagement that we did not already cover?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was organizational theory. Weber researched organizational theory in the early 1950s. Weber (1947) identified strategies organizations use to resolve issues and maximize productivity and efficiency. The focus of early researchers on organizational theory was on the division of workforce, rules and regulations, and centralized authority. Boyd (2014) agreed with the past literature but added that rules and regulations of the organizations are also key issues. Leaders touch every aspect of an organization. Organizational leadership and culture have a direct effect on employee engagement and performance (Rowlinson, Hassard, & Decker, 2014).

Weber’s organizational theory focused on the division of workforce, centralized authority, and rules and regulations of the organizations (Chavance, 2012; Pryor, Humphreys, Oyler, Taneja, & Toombs, 2011). Division of labor is defined as the distribution of tasks and encompasses finding the best person for each task. Centralized authority relates to creating clear lines of authority and using leaders to motivate employees (Boyd, 2014; Olafsen, Halvari, Forest, & Deci, 2015). Organizational rules and regulations are the predetermined processes in which an organization is set up to operate (Su, Baird, & Schoch, 2015). Organizational theory relates to this study because a researcher can explain how and why an organization operates in the manner that it does through organizational theory. Small business leaders face numerous challenges; organizational theory aligns well as the leaders must incorporate various strategies and processes to sustain their businesses.

Operational Definitions

Cognitive engagement: Cognitive engagement is whether an employee feels his/her job is safe and has meaning and whether the employee has the resources available to perform the job (Shuck & Reio, 2014).

Employee engagement: Employee engagement is when a worker exhibits a positive attitude, deems his or her work rewarding, and has a state of mind that is characterized by robustness, loyalty, and engagement (Anitha, 2014).

Job satisfaction: Job satisfaction is the culmination of emotions and attitudes that are influenced by a myriad of factors a person feels regarding the job he or she is performing (Cahill, McNamara, Pitt-Catsouphes, & Valcour, 2015).

Leadership behaviors: Leadership behaviors are the attitudes and behaviors that build a bond between the leader and employees, and can shape the results achieved (Silva, 2014).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are beliefs assumed true but are not supported by facts (Lips-Wiersma & Mills, 2014). I made three assumptions for this study. I assumed participants answered honestly, participants freely discussed the topic of employee engagement, and the employee handbook, mission and vision statement, and other documents I reviewed were reliable and valid.

Limitations

Henderson (2014) defined limitations as possible weaknesses in research, and these restrictions are typically out of the researcher's control. This study had two limitations. The first limitation was that the findings of this study only reflect the perspectives of the managers and employees who participated. Hence, the findings may not apply to other organizations. The second limitation was locating small business leaders in this geographical location with proven employee engagement strategies who were willing to participate in this study was difficult.

Delimitations

Delimitations are boundaries a researcher develops to set the focus of the research (Grant, 2014). In this study, two delimitations existed. The parameters of the study included small business leaders and did not allow for participants outside of the population. The sample size in the multiple case study included mitigation through data saturation. In the study, I used a purposeful sampling of participants to secure strategies on employee engagement.

Significance of the Study

The expertise of the leader and his or her ability to lead employees affects the success of a business (Jena et al., 2017). Leadership could affect employee engagement both positively and negatively. This study could be significant to business practice because organizational leaders may benefit by finding leadership strategies to efficiently maximize employee engagement, employee productivity, and ultimately profits. This study’s results may contribute to business practice by identifying strategies to improve small businesses productivity and organizational performance.

Leadership strategies to increase employee engagement have the potential to reduce employee disengagement (Jena et al., 2017). Organizational health is essential but so is the health of employees (He, Zhu, & Zheng, 2014). Employees are most likely to be active participants in society when they feel they fit in with the organization, trust their leaders, and can align themselves with organizational goals (Mishra et al., 2014). The data from this study may contribute to positive social change with small business sustainability that fosters prosperity of employees, families, and their communities. Small business leaders who are able to engage employees may decrease employee’s intent to quit and may improve employees’ home life and emotional well-being (Guest, 2014; Shuck & Reio, 2014).

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of a professional and academic literature review is to summarize, compare, and contrast various sources that relate to the research topic. The literature review includes information mostly from peer-reviewed journals. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies small business leaders use to increase employee engagement in the southwestern United States.

For this study, I acquired my sources from searching business and management databases within the Walden University Online Library. The database I used most commonly to obtain peer-reviewed full-text articles was the ABI/INFORM Complete database. I also used the following databases: (a) Business Source Complete, (b)

ProQuest, (c) Emerald Management Journal, (d) Government databases, including the SBA and U.S. Census Bureau, (e) Google Scholar, and (f) SAGE Premier. When using Google Scholar, I applied a filter to narrow the search to articles published in or after 2014 to ensure the results gained were relevant.

Key search words used included combinations of *employee engagement, organizational theory, employee disengagement, organizational behavior*, *leadership*, and *organizational fit*. The literature review includes a total of 102 references. Of the 102 articles used for this literature review, 87% of the publication dates are within the past 5 years, and 100 (98%) of the 102 references are peer-reviewed articles. The literature review begins with an introduction that details key word search strategies, frequency, along with publications dates. I organized this review into three categories and 10 subcategories. The categories included in the literature review are organizational theory, employee engagement, and employee engagement and leadership. Throughout the review of the literature, I contrasted and compared various views and links between past research and the findings of this study. A limitation of this literature review was the quantity of literature on topic that is relevant to the relevant population of small businesses. Many of the articles used in this literature review had different populations of larger businesses.

Conceptual Framework: Organizational Theory

Classic organizational theory began with Taylor in 1917. Taylor's theory blended bureaucratic theory, administrative theory, and scientific management (Puranam, Alexy, & Reitzig, 2014; Rowlinson et al., 2014). Taylor's theory was referred to as Taylorism, and it had four basic principles. The four principles were as follows: find the one and best way to accomplish each task, fit each worker to the task, closely supervise each worker and motivate with rewards and punishments, and understand that planning and control is management's responsibility (Puranam et al., 2014). Taylorism was successful on a small scale but did not work for large and complex organizations (Rowlinson et al., 2014). Researchers who employ Taylorism theory to employee engagement research tend to focus on job resources and job demand balance. Taylorism theory can improve production, individual task analysis, and person-task fit (Puranam et al., 2014). The philosophy of production first and people second that defines Taylorism theory can negatively affect employee morale, production, and product quality (Meyer & Hollerer, 2014; Puranam et al., 2014).

Weber built his organizational theory off Taylor's Taylorism theory and is a part of the classic organizational theorists. Weber's focus was on the division of workforce, centralized authority, and rules and regulations of the organizations (Chavance, 2012; Pryor et al., 2011). Weber's division of labor included the ideals of Taylorism's principle to fit each worker to the task. Weber's centralized authority encompassed Taylorism's principle to closely supervise each worker and motivate with rewards and punishment. Lastly, Weber's rules and regulations equated to Taylorism's principle that planning and control is management's responsibility, and it is necessary find the one and best way to accomplish each task. Classic organizational theory is categorized as rigid and mechanistic. A major downfall of classic organizational theories is how it links employee work motivation to organizational economic rewards (Meyer & Hollerer, 2014; Puranam et al., 2014). Since Weber stressed the importance of reducing diversity and ambiguity in organizations and setting up clear lines of authority, this ideology minimizes some of these effects (Rowlinson et al., 2014).

Mayo and Roethlisberger were developing their own organizational theory at the same time as Weber. Their theory is a part of the neoclassical organizational theory and is focused on the concerns for human needs (Davis, 2015; Meyer & Hollerer, 2014). Neoclassical organizational theory was formed to minimize the rigid and authoritarian ways of classical organizational theory. Mayo and Roethlisberger's Hawthorne experiment was based on the premise that any change had a positive effect on productivity (Meyer & Hollerer, 2014). This method soon lost favor as many felt it would lead to organizational leaders spinning their wheels and cynicism (Chen, Chen, & Sheldon, 2016; Mills, Weatherbee, & Durepos, 2014). The fear of most leaders was that data misinterpretation would occur with continual change (Davis, 2015; Meyer & Hollerer, 2014). The classical and neoclassical theorist approach was to take the path of least resistance or to avoid conflict.

Organizational theory evolved further with contingency and systems theorists. Where classical and neoclassical theorists focused on avoiding workplace conflict, contingency theorists felt it was a necessary and manageable component of the workplace (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2014; Mills et al., 2014). Systems theory was developed by von Bertalanffy, and this theory is based off the notion that all parts of the organization are interrelated (Chen et al., 2016; Puranam et al., 2014). A small change in one component of an organization can cause a huge change in another, and this is one of the biggest issues most theorists have with systems theory (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2014; Mills et al., 2014). The complexity implied by this nonlinearity makes it almost impossible to understand the total relationship between all the variables (Chen et al., 2016). A common ideology among the theorists in all three groups was the belief that management's main goal is to ensure equilibrium and control the workers and workplace environment (Davis, 2015; Meyer & Hollerer, 2014; Mills et al., 2014). While all these organizational theories can produce results, Weber's organizational theory and bureaucratic structure is still used by many organizations (Mills et al., 2014; Puranam, 2014). The organizational structure of businesses is increasing in complexity and is creating a need for a new structure (Chen et al., 2016; Ezzamel & Willmott, 2014). Weber's organizational theory provides a viable foundation for organizations to follow.

Weber's organizational theory. Researchers of organizational theory in the early 1940s further identified strategies organizations used to resolve issues and maximize productivity and efficiency (Onday, 2016; Rowlinson et al., 2014). Weber (1947) based his organizational theory on Taylorism and identified other strategies organizations use to resolve issues and maximize productivity and efficiency. Taylorism has four basic principles: (a) find the one and best way to accomplish each task, (b) fit each worker to the task, (c) closely supervise each worker and motivate with rewards and punishments, and (d) understand that planning and control is management's responsibility (Puranam et al., 2014). Weber took the principles of Taylorism and molded them to fit his thoughts on organizational theory. Weber's focus was on the division of workforce, centralized authority, and rules and regulations of the organizations (Chavance, 2012; Pryor et al., 2011). Weber's division of labor included the ideals of Taylorism's principle to fit each worker to the task. Weber's centralized authority encompassed Taylorism's principle to closely supervise each worker and motivate with rewards and punishment. Lastly, Weber's rules and regulations equated to Taylorism, where planning and control is management's responsibility and it is necessary to find the one and best way to accomplish each task. The division of workforce and centralized authority largely depend upon organizational leadership (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2014). Jain and Rajput (2017) asserted that initial organizational focus was on the division of workforce and centralized authority. Boyd (2014) agreed with Jain and Rajput but added that organizational rules and regulations are also factors.

Jain and Rajput (2017) and Sell (2017) agreed with Weber's basic organizational theory but argued that the theory should incorporate ethics. Ethics have a direct impact on organizational culture and commitment, which dictates organizational rules and regulations (Chess, 2001; Onday, 2016). Organizational leadership and culture have a direct impact on employee engagement and performance (Rowlinson et al., 2014). Haviland (2014) stated that trust, shared goals, and a shared language are vital for organizational success. Therefore, employees perceiving trust between leaders and employees will emulate their leader's behavior.

Pryor et al. (2011) agreed with Weber's theory but suggested Weber's research lacked the validity that comes from rigorous empirical testing. Pryor et al. and Chess (2001) felt a focus on human traits, specifically organizational theory, includes motivation. Chess and Sell (2017) studied the history of organizational theory and noted that previous literature left out the human behavior factor. Chess also believed that external environmental factors play a significant role in organizational efficiency. Chavance (2012) agreed with the basis of Weber’s organizational theory but felt Common’s organizational theory was more representative of an organization’s process. The concerns, working rules, and norms regulating an individual’s actions are the focus of Common’s theory (Chavance, 2012). There is a myriad of factors that go into building a successful organization, and leaders must understand how those factors are all intertwined.

Job demands are one of the factors that affect the organizational structure and lie within the rules and regulations section of organizational theory (Demerouti, Bakker, & Leiter, 2014; Haviland, 2014). The physical, social, mental, and corporate input from the employee is job demands (Haviland, 2014; Xiaoying & Albrow, 2016). Job demands can lead to employee stress and burnout. Leaders should know their staff need to see the meaning and value in work they do (Demerouti et al., 2014; Haviland, 2014; Lutzker, 1982; Xiaoying & Albrow, 2016). Employees can negatively impact organizations if they do not see meaning in their work.

The basis of Weber’s organizational theory is division of the workforce, centralized authority, and rules and regulations of the organizations. Thus, if an employee does not find their fit in the organization, they will become disengaged. Weber’s organizational theory is a basis that some organizational leaders can use to develop an organizational structure to foster employee engagement and success (Haviland, 2014; Lutzker, 1982; Xiaoying & Albrow, 2016). Corporate culture can also play a part in successful management. The culture an organization operates within affects employees’ performance and engagement (Filipova, 2015; Kim, Tracy, Biegel, Min, & Munson, 2015; Simpson, Clegg, & Pitsis, 2014).

Division of labor. Division of labor is the distribution of tasks and encompasses finding the best person for each task, or the right person-organizational fit. Person-organizational fit is defined as finding a person who shares the same values and goals of the respective organization (Basit & Arshad, 2016; Swider, Zimmerman, & Barrick, 2015). Organizational fit and job satisfaction are vital components for employee engagement (Haviland, 2014; Sarac, Efil, & Eryilmaz, 2014; Zdanyte & Neverauskas, 2014). An employee’s sense of belonging, or organizational fit, affects job performance, interaction with coworkers, and organizational commitment (Afsar & Bashir, 2016; Memon, Salleh, & Baharom, 2015). According to Basit and Arshad (2016), organizational culture is a tool that leaders can use to increase an employee’s perceived organizational fit. Basit and Arshad designed their research model after reviewing public university employees, but their design included data from various disciplines. Although Basit and Arshad based their research mainly in the higher education industry, they also conducted reviews of organizational culture over several disciplines and encompassed factors that are generalizable across businesses. Organizational fit, culture, and various aspects of a business are intertwined. Culture is the patterns and activities, attitudes, principles, and products within an organization (French & Bell, 1971; Kim et al., 2015). Corporate culture and organizational fit are vital for organizations, and organizational leaders need to understand how culture and fit impacts their employees and daily operations or they will not be successful (Basit & Arshad, 2016; Howell, 2017; Prywes, 2011). According to Kim, Tracey, Biegel, Min, and Munson (2015), there are a myriad of barriers to employee engagement. Kim et al. conducted a cross-sectional research design that encompassed 27 mental health facilities in three metropolitan areas in the state of Ohio. The research by Kim et al. included several factors that may be generalizable among industries.

Issues caused by low morale, turnover, bad person-organization fit, or culture clashes are directly attributable to the low performance of employees (Lian et al., 2014; Swider et al., 2015; Zuckerman & Golden, 2015). When leadership focuses on the organizational development efforts that encourage feelings and attitudes of employees as a team, they have achieved a successful organizational fit and culture (Basit & Arshad, 2016; Lian et al., 2014; Prywes, 2011). Organizational fit is conducive to the needs of employees because organizational fit can affect employee engagement and the success of the organization.

Afsar and Bashir (2016) and Memon, Salleh, and Baharom (2015) indicated leaders should consider a person's skills or abilities to perform the job, but they should also consider the applicant's fit within the organization during the firing process. Differences in work habits and staff relationships can affect organizational fit and lead to stress on the employee (Lian et al., 2014; Zuckerman & Golden, 2015). One of the easiest ways for an organization to sway change, increase employee engagement, and develop key strategies is through leadership (French & Bell, 1971; Lian et al., 2014). Engagement can grow in a positive organizational culture of social exchange (Howell, 2017;

Zuckerman & Golden, 2015). An organization's cultural environment is vital to success and increasing employee engagement.

Organizational leaders' values do affect employee behavior and engagement and affects employees perceived fit within the organization. Organizational executives need to realize these effects can be positive and negative, including an organization's ability to be successful (Howell, 2017; Umble & Umble, 2014). Merging cultures can increase an organization's chance of success (Kim et al., 2015; Simpson et al., 2014; Zuckerman & Golden, 2015). Organizational executives must realize how their leaders shape the ethical climate, employee engagement and commitment, change strategies, and sustainability.

The environment an organization operates within affects employees' behavior and engagement (Howell, 2017; Umble & Umble, 2014; Zuckerman & Golden, 2015). A culture that is fostering and healthy will help employees develop a bond with the organization and will ensure the success of the business. A greater chance of organizational failure is possible when leaders neglect the organization's culture (Howell, 2017; Zuckerman & Golden, 2015). The focus of leaders should be on attaining alignment, constancy, employee engagement, and control (Umble & Umble, 2014; Zuckerman & Golden, 2015). Howell (2017) and Schaufeli (2015) further discussed how leadership could increase the success of an organization and employee engagement if leaders have a positive reputation with their employees. The work culture and perceived fit within the organization by employees goes a long way in creating the brand image of the organization (Basit & Arshad, 2016; Onday, 2016; Schaufeli, 2015). The work culture gives an identity to the organization. Alignment occurs easier when employees' and organization's goals, vision, and values are similar (Schaufeli, 2015; Umble & Umble, 2014).

The culture of an organization represents certain predefined policies that guide the employees and gives them a sense of direction at the workplace (Onday, 2016; Umble & Umble, 2014). In division of labor, every individual is clear about his roles and responsibilities in his organization and knows how to accomplish the tasks ahead of the deadlines (Umble & Umble, 2014). Leadership must be able to deal with cultural clashes in a matter that leaves employees motivated and engaged (Cording, Harrison, Hoskisson, & Jonsen, 2014; Umble & Umble, 2014). The culture of the workplace controls the way employees behave amongst themselves as well as with people outside the organization (Howell, 2017; Onday, 2016). The culture dictates the way employees interact at their place of work (Cording et al., 2014; Onday, 2016; Schaufeli, 2015; Umble & Umble, 2014). A healthy culture encourages employees to stay motivated and loyal towards the management and organization. Leaders must use communication to create and maintain a healthy organizational culture (Cording et al., 2014; Onday, 2016; Umble & Umble, 2014). The culture of the workplace also goes a long way in promoting healthy competition at the workplace and increasing productivity (Howell, 2017; Zuckerman & Golden, 2015).

Centralized authority. Centralized authority relates to establishing clear lines of authority and use leaders to motivate employees (Olafsen et al., 2015). Employees clear about their role and responsibilities in the organization and know what is expected of them are more likely to develop loyalty and commitment to the organization (Whitson, Wang, See, Baker, & Murnighan, 2015). An individual's feelings about a business or group is the definition of organizational commitment (Bonner, Greenbaum, & Mayer, 2016; Vujicic, Jovicic, Lalic, Gagic, & Cvejanov, 2014). Garcia-Morales, Jimenez-Barrionuevo, and Gutierrez-Gutierrez (2012) discussed the importance of managers' ability to motivate and engage employees because if they are unable to do so the business could be negatively impacted. Schaufeli (2015) further discussed how leadership could increase the success of organizational strategies if leaders have a positive reputation with their employees. Mistrust of leadership and the organization by employees can result in lower levels of employee engagement and an increase in employee turnaround (Cording et al., 2014; Umble & Umble, 2014). A vital component of organizational success is trust.

The culture an organization operates within affects employees' performance, engagement, and commitment (Filipova, 2015; Schaufeli, 2015). According to Filipova's (2015) research, corporate culture is connected to power, commitment, and engagement. The location of Filipova's research was South Bulgaria and to the tourism industry, but the main factors used in the study are only generalizable to the tourism industry. Employees with low to no organizational commitment are likely to leave their employer at the first opportunity (Bonner et al., 2016; Schaufeli, 2015). For an organization to maintain their competitive advantage, business leaders should ensure their organizations have a stable workforce (Filipova, 2015; Silva, 2014). An engaged employee is less likely to display negative behaviors, such as absenteeism, disengagement, and turnover intentions (Bonner et al., 2016; Vujicic et al., 2014). Companies that have a positive work environment should have an easier time with encouraging organizational commitment from their employees. Researchers posited the perceived levels of commitment by leaders impacts employee engagement and commitment (Filipova, 2015; Silva, 2015).

A culture that nurtures employees is likely to ensure they develop a bond with the organization. Leadership affects all aspects of an organization and is a key factor in an organization's ability to be successful (Garcia-Morales, Jimenez-Barrionuevo, & Gutierrez-Gutierrez, 2012; Filipova, 2015; Silva, 2015). For an organization to stay successful and relevant, they must adapt to the changing culture around them. Trust is an important piece of organizational commitment, but trust can easily be impaired (Bonner et al., 2016; Filipova, 2015).

Employees need to have trust in their leaders and organization before they exhibit any level of engagement or commitment (Anitha, 2014; Kiliannan & Adjovu, 2015; Ugwu, Onyishi, & Rodriguez-Sanchez, 2014). Organizational commitment is a steadfast attitude, emulating an effective response to the organization closely related with the achieving of long-term goals (Anitha, 2014; Bonner et al., 2016; Kiliannan & Adjovu, 2015; Vujicic et al., 2014). When employees believe organizational commitment is beneficial, they will reciprocate with engagement and commitment (Filipova, 2015; Ugwu et al., 2014). Leadership is a connection between the leader and employee to achieve tasks and goals (Anitha, 2014; Silva, 2014; Vujicic et al., 2014). Leaders also affect the organization's culture. Culture can influence employee's performance and organizational commitment (Filipova, 2015; Silva, 2015). Organizational administrators must find ways to use leaders in their efforts to increase employee engagement and commitment (Anitha, 2014; Kiliannan & Adjovu, 2015; Ugwu et al., 2014).

An organization can successfully increase commitment through the inclusion of their employee’s views and input. Ugwu, Onyishi, and Rodriguez-Sanchez (2014) posited perceived fairness and support by organizations and leaders can affect employees’ levels of engagement and commitment. Growth and development of employees is a crucial factor in organizational commitment. Anitha (2014) and Rusyandi, Sule, Joeliaty, and Muizu (2016) stated leaders that can influence their followers would have greater success with organizational commitment than leaders that are not able to influence their followers. Conversely, if employees believe the leader is trustworthy, they are likely to exhibit a higher level of engagement and commitment (Anitha, 2014; Rusyandi et al., 2016).

Vujicic et al. (2014) and Rusyandi et al. (2016) stated organizational commitment was like a force that brings individuals together to accomplish several goals. Dedicated or committed employees have a work ethic that is strong and has a need to fulfill their job duties (Kilroy, Flood, Bosak, & Chenevert, 2017; Silva, 2014). Additionally, Filipova (2015) and Rusyandi et al. stated dedicated employees are willing to increase their work levels for the organization and are less likely to separate from the organization. Kilroy, Flood, Bosak, and Chenevert (2017) and Filipova argued balance between job requirements and assets affects an employee’s willingness to be absent from work. Absenteeism usually occurs when an employee believes that the job requires more energy emotionally and personal commitment than they receive in return from the organization (Kilroy et al., 2017; Rusyandi et al., 2016; Vujicic et al., 2014). Employees may not commit to an organization if they feel as though there is no alignment with organizational goals or if they do not feel a connection with their leaders (Filipova, 2015; Silva, 2014). Kilroy et al. further stated a lack of organizational commitment from employees might occur because that leader's ethics, career goals, and skills do not meet requirements.

Organizational rules and regulations. The expertise of the leader and their ability to effectively lead staff does affect a business' success (Anitha, 2014; Hernandez et al., 2014; Jena et al., 2017; Silva, 2014). Organizational rules and regulations are the predetermined processes in which an organization is set up to operate (Su et al., 2015). Organizational executives should use leaders and managers to motivate staff to accomplish organizational goals (Lam, O'Donnell, & Robertson, 2015; Nie, Chua, Yeung, Ryan, & Chan, 2015). Hartog and Belschak (2012) indicated that employee must believe the tasks they are doing matter and they are actively participating in the organization. The issue is finding the right leadership strategies leaders can implement to engage their employees successfully.

Leadership is a relationship between the leader and employee to accomplish similar tasks and goals (Silva, 2014). McClesky (2014), Fida et al. (2014), and Veiseh et al. (2014) concluded leadership does affect employee performance and retention, which falls in line with the rest of the literature, but the researchers noted organizational rules and regulations must be clear. Trust is now a key component of leadership effectiveness and a leader's ability to persuade employees to follow the rules and regulations of an organization (McClesky, 2014; Veiseh et al., 2014). McClesky and Nie, Chua, Yeung, Ryan, and Chan (2015) indicated employees trusting their leaders helps ensure employees follow the rules and increases employee engagement. Employees also value fairness. If an employee perceives fair treatment, they will be more productive and engaged, as this fulfills the meaningfulness of Kahn's theory of engagement (McClesky, 2014; Valentin et al., 2015). Veiseh et al. showed how leadership assists employees become more proactive and productive. Effective leadership is the using of influence by the leader to change or transform their followers (Chandani, Mehta, Mall, & Khokhar, 2016; Storm et al., 2014). The give and take between leader-employee opens the door for employees to be more creative and actively participate in defining organizational processes (McClesky, 2014; Veiseh et al., 2014). As employees participate more and feel as they fit in with the organization, their organizational engagement and commitment have changed (Chandani et al., 2016; Storm et al., 2014). Leadership enforces rule and regulations on employees ensures the use intellectual stimulus by the employee is related to the cognitive engagement of organizational theory (Chavance, 2012; Jain & Rajput, 2017; Silva, 2014). Requiring employees to use their intellectual abilities to assess and solve problems encourages cognitive engagement (Chandani et al., 2016; Storm et al., 2014). By insisting that employees actively participate in problem-solving and understanding regulations, leaders are creating an environment of intellectual stimulation (Breevaart et al., 2014; Shuck & Reio, 2014).

The focus of leadership is to create an environment that motivates and encourages employees to go above and beyond (Breevaart et al., 2014; Chandani et al., 2016). Effective leaders can give their followers a sense of empowerment, and they are encouraged to exceed expectations (Hernandez et al., 2014). Leaders are powerful individuals and can help organizations and employees achieve great things (Chandani et al., 2016). Leaders build up followers with coaching, team building, encouragement, and support (Breevaart et al., 2014; Hernandez et al., 2014). Leaders and followers should work together to help raise each other's moral and motivation levels (Chandani et al., 2016; Hernandez et al., 2014).

Leaders that permit followers to be innovative and visionary builds leader-follower trust. Idealized influence fosters an environment of relational identification between the leader-follower with high levels of cognitive emotional and behavioral engagement (Breevaart et al., 2014; Chandani et al., 2016; Shuck & Reio, 2014). Emotional engagement is increased by leaders using inspiration and motivation because they trust employees can reach organizational goals and vision (Breevaart et al., 2014; Davila & Pina-Ramirez, 2014; Shuck & Reio, 2014). Leaders should acknowledge the uniqueness of each employee and understand each one may require an individual leadership approach (Breevaart et al., 2014; Shuck & Reio, 2014).

Employee Engagement

Kahn defined employee engagement in the 1990s as employees able to harness themselves to their work roles physically, cogitatively, and emotionally (Breevaart et al., 2014; Handayani, Anggraeni, Andriyansah, Suharnomo, & Rahardja, 2017). Breevaart et al. (2014) agreed with Khan's definition of employee engagement but concluded that definition should extend to include vigor, dedication, and absorption. Employee engagement encompasses the level of motivation and devotion employees exhibit towards his or her job (Anitha, 2014; Bakker, 2014; Breevaart et al., 2014; Hernandez, Stanley, & Miller, 2014; Joyner, 2015). Organizations are social systems, and the human factor is vital to efficiency and effectiveness. Joyner (2015) and McManus and Mosca (2015) agreed with Kahn's definition of employee engagement, but Anitha (2014) concluded the definition should extend to include the awareness of responsibility and encouraging coworker. Bakker (2014) felt vigor, dedication, cognitive engagement, and absorption are the vital factors for obtaining employee engagement.

Kahn framed his engagement theory off Goffman's early 1960s work and the later works of Hackman and Oldham (Kahn, 1990). Goffman's theory centered around the attachment and detachment the employee has towards their jobs and Hackman and Oldman's focus was on job design (Kahn, 1990). Kahn's research indicated employees are engaged in their work when they can achieve three psychological conditions. The three psychological conditions are emotional safety, meaningfulness, and availability of resources (Kahn, 1990).

The extent to which employees experience meaning in their work affects their work engagement (Anitha, 2014; Kahn, 1990; Shuck & Reio, 2014). The level of employee engagement is also affected by the level of emotional safety experienced engagement (Kahn, 1990; Shuck & Reio, 2014). Kahn (1990), along with Shuck and Reio (2014), poised engagement level is affected by the availability of resources both personal and work-related. The main characteristics of Kahn's needs satisfying approach set the framework for identifying the conditions to foster engagement. The principles of this theory do not provide insight of the facets for engagement; instead, the theory provides a way to determine the conditions needed before engagement occurs.

Shuck and Reio (2014) stated engagement requires three facets that go along with Kahn's conditions. Those facets are cognitive, emotional, and behavioral (Shuck & Reio, 2014). Employees are cognitively evaluating their work environment use Kahn's three conditions of engagement (Anitha, 2014; Shuck & Reio, 2014). The extent of cognitive engagement relies on the employee's evaluation of the organizational culture (Shuck & Reio, 2014). Employees must achieve cognitive engagement before emotional engagement. When employees perceive their organization as providing necessary support, and when they are willing to invest their personal resources at work then emotional engagement is achieved (Anitha, 2014; Filipova, 2015; Shuck & Reio, 2014). Employees must attain emotional engagement before behavioral engagement. Lastly, the display of discretionary effort and willingness to improve performance on their own is when behavioral engagement attained (Anitha, 2014; Shuck & Reio, 2014).

Kahn's research indicates leaders are key factors for fostering an environment of high engagement (Anitha, 2014; Shuck and Reio, 2014). Anitha (2014) and Joyner (2015) agreed with the literature on employee engagement but added a key determinate of engagement hinges on employees enjoying their work environment and having trust and pride in their work. Employee engagement is about how committed and invested an employee is to an organization and its goals (Filipova, 2015; Mishra et al., 2014; Shuck & Reio, 2014). Employees are most productive and more likely to stay when they are engaged in their work, trust their leadership, and have aligned themselves with organizational goals (McManus & Mosca, 2015; Mishra et al., 2014; Shuck & Reio, 2014).

Cole, Walter, Bedeian, and O'Boyle (2012) agreed with the literature on employee engagement but added engagement is related to employee burnout and viewed burnout as the opposite of engagement. Breevaart et al. (2014) agreed with Cole et al. that burnout is related to engagement but argued burnout is not the opposite of engagement. Engagement does hinge on employees enjoying their work environment and having trust and pride in their work. If employees are actively engaged in their work, know the value and meaning of their job, trust their leader, and have aligned themselves with organizational goals, they are more productive and most likely to stay (Anitha, 2014; Breevaart et al., 2014; Handayani et al., 2017).

Valentin, Valentin and Nafukho (2015) asserted roughly 20% of the workforce is actively engaged and that this number is rapidly decreasing. Valentin et al. further emphasized this decrease in engagement costs business' billions of dollars in lost profits yearly. Leadership is a crucial factor for positive work outcomes with motivated and engaged employees. Joyner (2015) and McManus and Mosca (2015) stated there is a positive relationship between employee engagement, ethical leadership, trust, and communication. Kahn defined employee engagement to be when an employee can harness themselves to their work roles physically, cogitatively, and emotionally (Mishra et al., 2014; Shuck & Reio, 2014). The research by Shuck and Reio (2014) and De Clercq, Bouckenooghe, Raja, and Matsyborska (2014) agreed with Kahn's definition of employee engagement, but De Clercq et al. concluded the research should extend to include the damaging effects of employee deviation on organizations.

In small businesses, employee behavior and interactions with coworkers have an enormous impact on service quality and the wellbeing and health of each other (Jofreh, Aghaei, & Mamqani, 2014; Maymand, Abdollahi, & Elhami, 2017). The organizational culture is critical and is a key factor in how employees conduct themselves at work. Organization administrators should employ leaders able to make ethical decisions so that they may effectively manage (Effelsberg, Solga, & Gurt, 2014; Hernandez et al., 2014). Some individuals are strong enough to stand up for ethical issues on their own but may be more likely to do so if the leader is perceived to be ethical as well (Jofreh et al., 2014; Sarac et al., 2014). Once there is a breach of trust, managers may find it difficult to maintain the support of employees and productivity may go down (Maymand et al., 2017). An organization will not survive if their leaders do not have ethics or moral values (Effelsberg et al., 2014; Maymand et al., 2017; Sarac et al., 2014).

Employee engagement is a popular topic, as businesses seek to increase employee motivation. Onday (2016) agreed with Khan’s definition of employee engagement and how the employee must be physically and emotionally present to be fully engaged in their work. Organizational fit and job satisfaction are vital components for employee engagement (Effelsberg et al., 2014; Pirie, 2016; Sarac et al., 2014). Sahin, Cubuk, and Uslu (2014) stated engagement is the individual experience of the work and its framework, and how involved the workers were during the process. Jofreh, Aghaei, and Mamqani (2014) and Hernandez, Stanley, and Miller (2014) stated work engagement had five components. Those components are a decrease in job turnover, decreased absenteeism, job satisfaction, increased organizational commitment, and increased profitability.

Employee disengagement. Personal and work experiences influence employee engagement and disengagement (Kahn, 1990). Employee disengagement can be detrimental to an organization. While disengaged employees may stay with an organization, this leads to an increase in absenteeism, low productivity, burnout, and a decrease in an organization’s profitability (Jofreh et al., 2014; Sarac et al., 2014). Quick, Macik-Frey, and Cooper (2007) noted in 2007-2012 employees left an employer due to poor leadership and management. Businesses lose several billion dollars a year due to employee disengagement (Jofreh et al., 2014; Sarac et al., 2014). Businesses are negatively impacted by weak leadership through increased employee turn-over rates, decreases in production, and a decrease in product quality (He et al., 2014; Silva, 2014).

Unsatisfied employees will not be as engaged in their work, are less productive, and more likely to leave (Jofreh et al., 2014; Sarac et al., 2014). An average 50% to 70% of the workforce suffers from work disengaged adversely affecting the organization by profit loss and decreased product quality (Sarac et al., 2014). Jofreh et al. (2014) and Silva (2014) reviewed the difference between the perceptions of what normal work behaviors are in their actual job and the preferred workplace. Moreover, Sarac, Efil, and Eryilmaz (2014) maintained company profits for organizations with a high number of engaged employees are 40% greater than those without engaged employees. Sarac et al. limited their research to interviews of sales/marketing executives of two cities in China and it lacks generalization. Despite these limitations, Sarac et al.'s research is important as it links an employee's engagement and well-being at work to their satisfaction.

Employee disengagement affects organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and employee engagement (He et al., 2014; Sarac et al., 2014). Leaders need strategies for minimizing job turnover, burnout, and stress on employees. He, Zhu, and Zheng (2014) reviewed the various ways fits between individuals and organizations are made and the factors that contribute to those fits. Behavioral norms relate to stress and job satisfaction, and individuals consider their environmental fit to a work setting during their employment hunt (He et al., 2014; Jofreh et al., 2014). The inconsistencies in person to environmental fit can create stress for an employee, eventually resulting in them terminating their employment (He et al., 2014; Sarac et al., 2014). Conversely, the employee may perceive a stressful job as the perfect fit and be willing to accept employment (He et al., 2014; Jofreh et al., 2014; Sarac et al., 2014).

Organizational administrators should employ leaders able to make ethical decisions so they may effectively manage (Sahin et al., 2014; Spector & Mieier, 2014; Zdanyte & Neverauskas, 2014). Sometimes the dilemma managers are faced with is when assigning their employees tasks perceived to be illegitimate (Effelsberg et al., 2014; He et al., 2014). An illegitimate task is one believed to be unnecessary, unreasonable or not related to their normal job functions, and the task causes employees stress and dissatisfaction (Patnaik, Satpathy, & Das, 2015). The dilemma is the use of questionable or unethical tactics to get employees to perform certain job tasks. Once there is a breach of trust, leaders will have difficulty maintaining the support of employees and productivity may go down (Effelsberg et al., 2014; He et al., 2014; Patnaik et al., 2015). An organization will have difficulty achieving longevity if their leaders do not have ethics or moral values (Effelsberg et al., 2014; Patnaik et al., 2015; Sahin et al., 2014).

When managers use unethical means to get tasks accomplished, the trust between employer/employee may cause staff to disengage from their jobs (Patnaik et al., 2015). These situations cause stress on the employee and manager (He et al., 2014; Patnaik et al., 2015; Spector & Mieier, 2014). Human resource administrators should analyze the methods unethical managers used to get employees to perform these illegitimate tasks. Patnaik, Satpathy, and Das (2015) and Leiter and Maslach (2016) explained how the nature of the tasks should be thoroughly explained to the employees to minimize the perceptions of illegitimacy.

When employees become disengaged, they will avoid assigned tasks or find other non-job related tasks to occupy their time (He et al., 2014; Leiter & Maslach, 2016). Jofreh et al. (2014) and Sohail and Rehman (2015) asserted individuals would use various disengagement strategies, such as frequent breaks, socializing with coworkers, and personal tasks to avoid job duties. Leiter and Maslach. (2016) agreed with Jofreh et al.'s assertion on disengagement strategies but added that monetary incentives alone would not mitigate disengagement strategies.

Employee burnout. Job demands are one of the factors that affect the organizational structure and lie within the rules and regulations section of organizational theory (Demerouti et al., 2014; Xiaoying & Albrow, 2016). Job demands are referred to as aspects of the job that include physical, social, mental, and organizational input from the employee (Demerouti et al., 2014; Haviland, 2014; Xiaoying & Albrow, 2016). Job demand can lead to employee stress and burnout. Leaders should know their staffs need to see the meaning and value in work they do (Haviland, 2014; Lutzker, 1982; Xiaoying & Albrow, 2016). If an employee does not see the meaning of their work, this disengaged feeling causes a negative impact on the organization. Meaningfulness is one of the three psychological conditions that must be met for employee engagement to occur (Kahn, 1990; Simpson et al., 2014). If employees do not find meaning in their work, engagement is unlikely to happen. Organizational fit and job satisfaction are vital components for employee engagement (Haviland, 2014; Kim et al., 2015; Sarac et al., 2014; Zdanyte & Neverauskas, 2014).

Kim et al. (2015) and Simpson et al. (2014) looked at the impact illegitimacy of tasks have on employee job satisfaction and burnout. Stoyanova and Iliev's (2017) research illustrated how the perception of a task being illegitimate caused employees to feel increased stress and resentment. This situation causes employee burnout (Demerouti et al., 2014). The purpose of Stoyanova and Iliev's research was to find a correlation between stress and legitimacy of tasks. The legitimacy of a task is correlated to stress and burnout (Demerouti et al., 2014; Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017; Yildiz & Yildiz, 2016). The perception that a task is illegitimate has a significant psychological and cognitive effect on an employee's emotional wellbeing and can increase the likelihood of burnout (Kim & Park, 2017; Yildiz & Yildiz, 2016).

Kim et al.'s (2015) research focused on the correlation between the two types of stress (psychological and physiological) and burnout on job satisfaction. Breevaart et al.

(2014) and Yildiz and Yildiz (2016) indicated a correlation exists between “acceptable” stress as it relates to the job position and burnout. There is a triangular relationship between stress, burnout, and job satisfaction when the primary factor is job satisfaction. When changing the focus to the level of stress, the acceptable level varied depending on the job status held by the respondent (Kim & Park, 2017; Yildiz & Yildiz, 2016). Breevaart et al. and Yildiz and Yildiz agreed with the literature on employee engagement but added engagement is related to employee burnout and consider burnout to be the opposite of engagement. Engagement does hinge on employees enjoying their work environment and having trust and pride in their work (Demerouti et al., 2014; Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017). If employees are actively engaged in their work, know the value and meaning of their job, trust their leader, and have aligned themselves with organizational goals, they are more productive and most likely to stay (Breevaart et al., 2014; Handayani et al., 2017; Kim & Park, 2017; Yildiz & Yildiz, 2016). When employees reach this state of engagement, the employees have reached all three of Khan's psychological conditions. Patnaik et al. (2015) and Handayani et al. (2017) stated the main factor that causes stress is burnout; this factor can lead to stress, professional dissatisfaction in employees, and resentment. Professional dissatisfaction and burnout are most commonly occurring in a situation when an allocation of a huge number of tasks is spread out to a smaller number of employees (Breevaart et al., 2014; Handayani et al., 2017). Patnaik et al. posited resentment could lead to employees asking why am I doing this and why do I have to do this. Another stress factor is illegitimate tasks, and illegitimate tasks are just as detrimental as burnout to employee performance. Illegitimate tasks are simply tasks now being performed by an employee that were not a part of their regular job routine (Patnaik et al., 2015; Simpson et al., 2014).

Leaders require training to identify patterns of work avoidance, disengagement strategies, and burnout (He et al., 2014; Hernandez et al., 2014; Patnaik et al., 2015). Through use of communication, leaders will head off some potentially stressful situations that can lead to employee burnout (Handayani et al., 2017; Sohail & Rehman, 2015). While Breevaart et al. (2014) agree burnout is related to engagement, they argued burnout is not the opposite of engagement. Stress is a natural phenomenon that can lead to positive or negative outcomes and can affect employee engagement (Handayani et al., 2017; Patnaik et al., 2015). The destructive consequences of stress are obstacles that can potentially reduce productivity and lead to employee burnout (Handayani et al., 2017; Patnaik et al., 2015; Sohail & Rehman, 2015). Burnout creates changes in employee behavior that can eventually lead to controversy within the work setting (Patnaik et al., 2015; Sohail & Rehman, 2015). By identifying burnout factors, organizational leaders can potentially mitigate these factors and establish a healthier work environment (Handayani et al., 2017). Successful leaders are observant and communicate often with their staff.

Job stress. Leaders have the responsibility of ensuring values of the organization and its members align with the values and behaviors they are seeking to promote (Anitha, 2014; Chen, Sparrow, & Cooper, 2016). He et al. (2014) introduced a notion where supervisors are encouraged to care and show empathy for direct reports. Fox, Morrow-Howell, Herbers, Battista, and Baum (2017) stated stress is a proportional response to an external outside factor that encourages the psychological, behavioral, cognitive, and psychological consequences for each person and leads to uncharacteristic behavior. Anitha (2014) and Shuck and Reio (2014) posited increased levels of stress in the workplace cause a decrease in productivity and engagement. Uncertainty among employees can occur if they perceive themselves as not fitting in an organization (Anitha, 2014; Shuck & Reio, 2014). Uncertainty can lead to job stress among employees and leaders (Chen et al., 2016). Kahn's psychological conditions of meaningfulness and safety clashes with uncertainty in employees making it difficult for employees to achieve work engagement.

The inconsistencies in person to organizational fit can create stress for an employee, eventually resulting in them terminating their employment (He et al., 2014; Sarac et al., 2014). The basis of the organizational theory is a division of workforce, centralized authority, and rule and regulations of the organization; so, if an individual is uncertain about their fit, it can lead to adverse effects. Conversely, the employee may perceive a stressful job as the perfect fit and be willing to accept employment (Kim et al., 2016; Pirie, 2016; Sarac et al., 2014). Chen et al. (2016) posited high levels of leader interactions and transparency with employees could reduce uncertainty and stress. The increase in leader-employee interaction and transparency can lead to increases in productivity and job satisfaction (Pirie, 2016; Sarac et al., 2014). Before an individual can feel engagement, there must be an environment conducive to engagement (Anitha, 2014; Shuck & Reio, 2014). Chen et al. stated uncertainty could cause stress on employees and lead to insecurities. Leaders can decrease the level of stress and uncertainty through openness and communication (Fox et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2016; Pirie, 2016).

Some of the costs organizations face are expenditures for low morale, dissatisfaction, low quality, absence, and dissatisfaction due to stress. Fox et al. (2017) noted about 75% of losses and harms in work are consequences of stress in organizations. Additionally, Anitha (2014) indicated absenteeism due to stress comprises 60% of all employee absences. Moreover, the complaints about stress in workplaces adds increased costs to organizations. Workers' complaints against their employers for stressful jobs incur considerable costs for organizations (Chen et al., 2016; Fox et al., 2017). Employees notice nonverbal cues given by leaders (Pirie, 2016; Sarac et al., 2014). If employees perceive themselves treated fairly, they will cognitively engage in their work (Anitha, 2014; Cording et al., 2014; Shuck & Reio, 2014)

Employee Engagement and Leadership

Organizations are affected by weak leadership strategies through employee disengagement, employee turnover rates, employee burnout, a decrease in production, and a reduction in product quality (Anitha, 2014; Breevaart et al., 2014; Hernandez et al., 2014; Silva, 2014). Leadership is a significant factor that affects employee engagement, job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Anitha, 2014; Breevaart et al., 2014; Jena et al., 2017). Work engagement is experienced by less than 20% of employees, which causes adverse consequences to organizations (Fox et al., 2017; Valentin et al., 2014). Anitha (2014) and Shuck and Reio (2014) stated business leaders cannot demand engagement from their employees. Organizational leaders that employ strategies to increase employee engagement can increase organizational success.

Leaders who are ethical, moral, and personable encourage their employees to model those same values (Hernandez et al., 2014; Sadeghi & Pihie, 2012; Silva, 2014). There is a direct connection between leadership and employee engagement. Leadership is vital to organizational success (Fox et al., 2017; Silva, 2014). The ability to understand how to develop successful leadership strategies will help ensure organizational success (Fox et al., 2017; Osborne & Hammoud, 2017; Valentin et al., 2014). Satisfied employees are more likely to remain with their employer (Kim & Parker, 2017; Sadeghi & Pihie, 2012). Ugwu et al. (2014) stated the responsibility of employee engagement strategies rested on the employee and organizational leaders. The relevancy of employee engagement encompasses various disciplines to include but not limited to organizational psychology, business, organizational research, and management (Kim & Park, 2017; Osborne & Hammoud., 2017; Ugwu et al., 2014). Sadeghi and Pihie (2012) and Ugwu et al. findings indicated that business leaders build their employee engagement strategies on the employer-employee trust relationship.

Employee engagement requires a high level of commitment from organizations and leaders because employee engagement is not a short-term issue (Anitha, 2014; Valentin et al., 2014). Dai and Qin (2016) discussed the importance of managers' ability to deal with crises and stress effectively, because if they do not the organization could suffer negative exposure, decreased productivity, turnover, employee disengagement, and stakeholder interests compromised. Dai and Qin further discussed how a positive and sustainable reputation is a determinant of an organization's ability to generate wealth, increase employee engagement, and be successful. Poor leadership can lead to decreased profitability and employee commitment. When employees lack psychological attachment to an organization and leaders, there is a decrease in trust, commitment, and job satisfaction (Dai & Qin, 2016; Osborne & Hammoud, 2017; Ugwu et al., 2014). Onday (2016), Osborne and Hammoud. (2017), and Ugwu et al. (2014) stated there is not a single strategy for employee engagement, as an understanding of the organizational interactions is needed.

Rewards are incentives that may take the form of appraisals, promotion, praise, and other award systems (Chipchase et al., 2017). Recognition, pay increases, promotions, and job security are factors that can increase employee job satisfaction and engagement (Anitha, 2013; Chipchase et al., 2017; Shuck & Reio, 2014; Silva, 2014). The factors that affect leadership also influence the success of employee engagement initiatives. Barrick, Thurgood, Smith, and Courtright (2015) defined leadership as more of a process that involves a group influenced by an individual to obtain a common goal or goals. A strong and charismatic leader is needed when a business is under stress to ensure employee commitment and engagement (Chipchase et al., 2017; Fox et al., 2017; Valentin et al., 2015). The key factors that may contribute to the success of leadership vary from industry to industry (Barrick, Thurgood, Smith, and Courtright, 2015). Leadership transparency relates back to Kahn's three psychological conditions for engagement and organizational theory and how employees need to feel included and see the purpose of their job.

Transactional leadership. Transactional leadership is defined by the give and take that occurs between the leader and followers (Chandani et al., 2016; Storm et al., 2014). Some examples are promotions for exceeding goals or rewarding good grades (Fida et al., 2014). Leaders and followers are interacting with each other, but the leader is not focused on the needs and motives of the follower (Chandani et al., 2016). Another way to describe this type of leadership is that leaders promise/give something in return for desired behavior from their followers. This type of leadership uses contingent reward and management by exception to accomplish organizational goals (Chandani et al., 2016; Fida et al., 2014; Storm et al., 2014). Contingent reward hinges on using rewards for goal attainment (Breevaart et al., 2014; Fida et al., 2014; Storm et al., 2014). Specific rules are imposed to mitigate unwanted behaviors in management by exception (Chandani et al., 2016; Fida et al., 2014; Storm et al., 2014).

Transactional leadership is common in most organizations and is appropriate for most situations in business (Breevaart et al., 2014; Chandani et al., 2016; Storm et al., 2014). This leadership style is appropriate in most settings because the leader is typically content with operating under the current confinements and is not looking to make changes (Breevaart et al., 2014; Storm et al., 2014). Leaders using this style of leadership employ contingent rewards and management by exception to accomplish goals (Breevaart et al., 2014; Chandani et al., 2016; Storm et al., 2014). Followers who are over-achievers or outperforming the rest receive promotions or raises (Davila & Pina-Ramirez, 2014). Contingent reward becomes the motivating factor leaders use on employees to get the job done (Breevaart et al., 2014; Fida et al., 2014; Storm et al., 2014). Managing by exception is when leaders implement specific rules to mitigate unwanted outcomes (Breevaart et al., 2014; Chandani et al., 2016; Fida et al., 2014). This give and take exchange between leaders and followers is typical and gets the job done, but it does not allow for innovation or forward thinking from the follower (Chandani et al., 2016; Storm et al., 2014).

Transactional leadership can be effective and useful, but it does not assist in the growth and development of employees. For transactional leadership to be effective, followers must be content to work in the present environment and not try to change things (Breevaart et al., 2014; Chandani et al., 2016; Storm et al., 2014). Leaders using transactional leadership attain their power by hierarchy and position (Breevaart et al., 2014; Davila & Pina-Ramirez, 2014) and not by innovative leadership. Typically, transactional leaders are not visionary (Storm et al., 2014). Transactional leaders typically are missing this characteristic and is consistent with the literature (Breevaart et al., 2014; Chandani et al., 2016). There are instances when transactional leadership will be effective and beneficial to an organization. Transactional leadership excels in defining expectations, responsibilities, and goal attainment (Breevaart et al., 2014; Chandani et al., 2016), so this style might work for an organization that is only concerned with organizational wellbeing and not their employees.

Leader-member exchange leadership. The leader-member exchange style of leadership is based on the relationship between the leader and follower (Hill, Kang, & Seo, 2014; Matta, Scott, Koopman, & Conlon, 2015). Leader-member exchange leadership is a theory developed by a group of researchers in 1975. Dansereau, Graen, and Haga are credited as the developers of the leader-member exchange theory (Hill et al., 2014). The exchange between leaders and followers that occur inside the vertical dyad is the basis for this theory (Hill et al., 2014; Liao, Wayne, Liden, & Meuser, 2016; Matta et al., 2015). Personal attention, leadership support, and trust are some of the high-quality components of leader-member exchange (Liao et al., 2016; Matta et al., 2015). The characteristics of a low-quality leader-member exchange are when the leader-follower relationship lacks trust and supervisory support (Hill et al., 2014; Matta et al., 2015). The focus of this theory is on the connection, or social exchange leader's make with their individual followers (Hill et al., 2014; Liao et al., 2016; Matta et al., 2015). The leader-follower relationship is the most important component of this theory, and the quality of the relationship can range from low to high based on the strength and basis of the bond. Essentially, the leadership happens when leaders and followers can create a bond with a reciprocated level of influence (Liao et al., 2016; Matta et al., 2015).

The leader-member exchange leader can give some followers an advantage over the other followers. If followers are top producers or in good with a leader, then they can be given access to more information or resources than the rest of the followers (Hill et al., 2014; Liao et al., 2016). This leadership style can cause a divide between the leaders and followers (Hill et al., 2014; Liao et al., 2016; Matta et al., 2015). At times, leaders favor certain followers, not necessarily top producers, and this can cause damage to employee morale and engagement. If nonperformers get preferential treatment, it causes issues with the followers that were effective and working hard but were not given the recognition or rewards that they deserved (Hill et al., 2014; Liao et al., 2016). This aspect conflicts with

Kahn's three psychological conditions. The three psychological conditions are emotional safety, meaningfulness, and availability of resources (Kahn, 1990). When leaders reward top producers, production and employee engagement increases (Liao et al., 2016). If all the leaders use the same standards, this could be an effective form of leadership (Hill et al., 2014; Matta et al., 2015).

Leadership on engagement. Leadership is a key component to organizational sustainability and success (Nwokolo, Ifeanacho, & Anazodo, 2016; Sadeghi & Pihie, 2012; Silva, 2014). Leadership is dynamic and is largely dependent on the situation (Ruck, Welch, & Menara, 2017; Srivastava & Madan, 2017). Control has been replaced by employee engagement as a critical factor, which demands that organizational leaders shift focus to strategies that center on employee engagement (Megha, 2016; Ruck et al., 2017; Ugwu et al., 2014). Organizational executives should develop leaders who can effectively lead employees and create a corporate culture that is open and inviting (Jain & Rajput, 2017; Jena et al., 2017; Xiaoying & Albrow, 2016). Leaders should ensure that they employ the right people for each position (Srivastava & Madan, 2017). Leadership effectiveness is determined by trust, communication, and other relational dynamics between the leader and employees (Herminingsih, 2017; Nwokolo et al., 2016; Sadeghi, & Pihie, 2012). Providing clear job roles, clear expectations, and rewards impact engagement (Jena et al., 2017; Ruck et al., 2017; Ugwu et al., 2014; Valentin et al., 2015). This way, clear job roles and expectations satisfy Weber's centralized authority and rules and regulations conditions in organizational theory (Haviland, 2014; Jain & Rajput, 2017; Xiaoying & Albrow, 2016).

Job satisfaction, employee burnout, and employee retention are issues all leaders deal with daily. The issue is because there are not one-size fits all for leadership. Leadership has a direct impact on employee performance and engagement (Jena et al., 2017; Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017; Yildiz & Yildiz, 2016). So, leaders must find the leadership behaviors and style that fits their organizational culture and employees. Otherwise, businesses will continue to lose on average $300 billion dollars a year due to disengaged employees (Valentin et al., 2015). The organizational culture is imperative and is a key factor in how employees conduct themselves at work (Jain & Rajput, 2017; Jena et al., 2017; Xiaoying & Albrow, 2016). An honest and authentic interest by leaders is required to understand the complexities of employee engagement (Hermininingsih, 2017; Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017; Yildiz & Yildiz, 2016).

Since leaders are to develop better organizations, organizational administrators must invest in building better leaders. Meaningfulness, safety, and availability of resources are the psychological conditions required for employee engagement; and these are the things required of leaders to provide on a continuous basis for continued engagement (Ruck et al., 2017; Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017; Yildiz & Yildiz, 2016). Organizational leaders should employ the right employee to meet not only the job requirement but also the right organizational fit. If an employee perceives they found their organizational fit, it fulfills the meaningfulness aspect of Kahn’s psychological condition and Weber’s organizational theory (Breevaart et al., 2014; Chavance, 2012; Haviland, 2014). Leadership is one of the easiest ways to influence the organization and drive key strategies (Lian et al., 2014; Matta et al., 2015; Megha, 2016;). Therefore, organizational leaders should invest time and resources to employ the right people that will help them be successful (Schaufeli, 2015). If leaders can ensure the availability of required resources, this will satisfy another of Kahn’s conditions, availability of resources (Kahn, 1990). Schaufeli (2015) further discussed how leadership can increase the success of change strategies if leaders have a positive reputation with their employees.

Leadership affects all aspects of an organization and is a key factor in an organization’s ability to be successful (Howell, 2017; Schaufeli, 2015). Organizational administrators must realize how their leaders shape the ethical climate, employee commitment, change strategies, and sustainability. Effective leaders understand that to be successful; they must be able to change their style of leadership to fit the situation (Howell, 2017; Iddagoda & Opatha, 2017). There is a strong relationship between ethical climate and ethical behavior (Iddagoda & Opatha, 2017; Schaufeli, 2015). The climate an organization operates within affects employees’ behavior and change initiatives (Howell, 2017; Iddagoda & Opatha, 2017). A culture that is nurturing and healthy will help employees develop a bond with the organization and will ensure the success of organizational change (Matta et al., 2015; Megha, 2016). Howell (2017), Schaufeli (2015), and Iddagoda and Opatha (2017) highlighted that their research was conducted using a single style of leadership and its effects on engagement. The fact that their research was limited to one leadership style limits the findings as none of the research reviewed the links on mixed leadership styles and engagement.

The research data indicates transformational leaders can elicit higher levels of employee engagement (Breevaart et al., 2014; Howell, 2017; Iddagoda & Opatha, 2017;

Schaufeli, 2015). This situation is due partly to employees' perception that transformational leaders are more concerned with organizational goals instead of being power-hungry individuals focused on self-interests (Howell, 2017; Iddagoda & Opatha, 2017; Schaufeli, 2015). Additionally, transformational leadership has increased levels of engagement because of engagement antecedents (Breevaart et al., 2014; Howell, 2017; Schaufeli, 2015). A dynamic and capable leader will help an organization be vital and employees become more productive; which enables the organization to maintain a competitive edge (Howell, 2017; Quick et al., 2007). Organizational value and sustainability are produced by employees who are satisfied, loyal, engaged, and productive (Iddagoda & Opatha, 2017; Schaufeli, 2015). Trusting and empowered employees are happy, and this helps to foster a strong, healthy organizational culture and will ensure organizational success (Howell, 2017; Iddagoda & Opatha, 2017). For leaders to successfully employ these types of employees, leaders must be able to exert influence over their employees.

Business leaders tend to focus on accomplishing tasks and not on building their employees; and this creates situations that are detrimental to the success of the organization and employee (Howell, 2017; Iddagoda & Opatha, 2017). Executive leaders should take care to review their organization's goals, strength, resources, employees, culture, and other pertinent factors before implementing a leader (Ruck et al., 2017; Yildiz & Yildiz, 2016). Leaders should provide purpose, improve operations, and direction to their employees to increase employee engagement and organizational success (Iddagoda & Opatha, 2017; Schaufeli, 2015). There is a theoretical link between leadership behavior and increasing employee engagement (Howell, 2017; Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017; Yildiz & Yildiz, 2016). However, some researchers stated gaps are present in direct identification of which leadership behaviors increase employee engagement levels (Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017; Yildiz & Yildiz, 2016). Furthermore, when leaders establish an environment that allows for engagement, increased levels of employee engagement are achieved (Howell, 2017; Iddagoda & Opatha, 2017; Yildiz & Yildiz, 2016). A thorough understanding of how the words and actions of leaders affect employee engagement is needed (Ruck et al., 2017; Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017; Yildiz & Yildiz, 2016). Leaders do not work in a vacuum; followers' behaviors affect them. There is a need for further research on the link between leadership behaviors and the effects on employee engagement (Howell, 2017; Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017; Yildiz & Yildiz, 2016). The process of increasing employee engagement levels should begin with leaders who are engaged and understand the needs and requirements of their direct reports.

Transition

Section 1 contained the problem and purpose statements, central research question, and the nature of the study that justified using the qualitative method and multiple case design. The business problem of this study was that some small business leaders lack the necessary strategies to increase employee engagement. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies small business leaders use to increase employee engagement. The overarching research question for this study was: what strategies do small business leaders use to increase employee engagement? Section 1 also included the operational terms, significance of the study, conceptual framework and interview questions. The significance of this study to business practice is organizational leaders may benefit by finding leadership strategies to effectively maximize employee engagement, employee productivity, and ultimately profits. Section 1 ended with a review of the academic literature. The review of the literature contained an analysis of organizational theory and application of strategies small business leaders can use to increase employee engagement.

Section 2 consisted of the project purpose, role of the researcher, participants, and the research method and design. Section 2 also contained information on ethical research, data collection instruments and techniques, and reliability and validity. Section 3 starts with an introduction to the purpose statement, research question, and findings. Section 3 will also cover application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations.

Section 2: The Project

The objective of Section 2 was to provide the purpose of the study and the research conducted. The research method and design used was a qualitative multiple case study. I interviewed participants and reviewed company documents to identify strategies small business leaders use to increase employee engagement.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies small business leaders use to increase employee engagement. The targeted population for this study included five leaders of four small businesses in the southwestern United States who have successfully used leadership strategies to increase employee engagement. The data from this study may contribute to positive social change with small business sustainability that fosters prosperity of employees, employees' families, and communities. By creating a work environment that fosters employee engagement, small business leaders may also contribute to social change through an employee's improved home life and emotional well-being.

Role of the Researcher

The primary roles of a qualitative researcher involve data collection, data organization, and analysis of the results (Collins & Cooper, 2014). In case studies, the researcher is substantially involved in the data collection process (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014; Yin, 2014; Yu, Abdullah, & Saat, 2014). I served as the primary data collector in this study. I was familiar with the topic because I brought over 10 years of experience in various leadership roles within small and large businesses. I did not know any of the staff or leaders from the targeted population for this study.

The primary data collection method was face-to-face interviews. In case studies, a common practice is for the researcher to use the interview method to allow the participants to share their strategies (Yin, 2014; Yu et al., 2014). An interview protocol is a script detailing the interview process (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). I used the interview protocol located in Appendix A for the interview process. A qualitative researcher attempts to shape a framework using theories from a variety of sources (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014; Yin, 2014). I collected the data from the participants and analyzed the data to find thematic patterns. I included secondary organizational data with the interviews. Researchers typically include secondary data for data triangulation (Park & Park, 2016). Archival data are a part of the data collection process.

Observing the procedures outlined in the Belmont Report assisted me in mitigating the bias I might have regarding study. One role of the researcher is to protect the participants and provide quality research (Yin, 2014). The ethical code of standards applied to all conversations in person, over the phone, mail, and electronic communications to ensure the protection of participants' identification and the trust between the researcher and participant. Researchers should set aside preconceptions, biases, and preconceived ideas about things (Harvey, 2015; Yin, 2014).

Qualitative researchers are to notate and define their experiences regarding the approaches to explore the strategies from a fresh viewpoint (Harvey, 2015; Yin, 2014). To minimize bias, I did not contact any participants before the start of the research, I conducted the research with an open mind, I did not discount opposing views, and I used an interview protocol to ensure each of the interviews occurred in the same manner. To further mitigate bias, I compiled the data based on participants' responses, and I used member checking to verify the validity of the responses. Member checking is a way of confirming participants' responses by their review of interview transcripts (Harvey, 2015). The findings from this study should offer employee engagement strategies leaders can use in their businesses.

Employing prior case study data collection methods and findings on employee engagement mitigates the risk of researcher bias (Mayer, 2015). Use of past research for collecting and analyzing data supports the data interpretations and findings of this study (Yin, 2014). Walden University has a set of policies and procedures on ethical research that doctoral students must follow. Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) must approve all components of a study before a researcher may start collecting data on the project.

An interview protocol was in place to ensure all participants received equal treatment and to mitigate bias. I introduced myself to each participant. I advised participants' recordings and notes of the sessions that occurred. I reviewed the Belmont Protocol Report (Belmont Report, 1979). I completed the National Institutes of Health web-based training course. It is typical for researchers to complete the National Institutes of Health training to ensure compliance with ethical standards and the protection of human research participants (Mayer, 2015; Taylor & Land, 2014).

Participants

The participants in this study worked as leaders or managers in a small or medium-sized company in the southwestern United States. I provided participants an informed consent letter for the study. This consent letter included an explanation of the trusted nature of the study and required each participant to sign an informed consent form before each interview. I followed Walden University's IRB guidelines as well as research protocols identified in the Belmont Report to recruit study participants. To avoid misconceptions, selected participants should receive a written and verbal disclosure of the study (Blease, Lillienfeld, & Kelley, 2016; Saxena, 2017; Yin, 2014).

The preferred sample size in a qualitative study is between five and 50 participants (Dworkin, 2012; Saxena, 2017; Yin, 2014). I used purposeful sampling to reach a sample of potential participants. Purposeful sampling methods in qualitative research target a population meeting a category of cases to gain a sample of participants in the phenomenon (Dworkin, 2012; Saxena, 2017; Yin, 2014). Inclusion criteria are vital to ensure selection of suitable participants (Robinson, 2014). I engaged with members of the small to medium business community before recruitment to obtain recommendations of suitable candidates for my study. I selected members of my study population based on the specified eligibility criteria to participate in the study: (a) management experience within a small to medium business, (b) small business located in the southwestern United States, (c) be at least 18 years old, and (d) experience developing strategies to increase employee engagement. Leaders who met the above requirements qualified to participate in this study.

Once I received approval from the Walden University's IRB, I identified and recruited eligible participants for the study. I used a strategy for acquiring access to participants through professional networking by contacting professional contacts through LinkedIn and using Google to gather company officials' information. Once I established a list of potential participants, participants received a recruitment letter (located in Appendix B) to identify eligible leaders or managers. Standard practice for researchers is to ask preliminary participants to recommend other candidates who may want to participate in the study (Tirgari, 2012). This method of recruitment is referred to as snowball sampling (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014; Willgens et al., 2016). I did not use snowball sampling to identify other eligible study participants because I reached data saturation after five interviews.

When data collection and analysis from new interviews produces little to no changes to the already noted themes and codes, data saturation has been reached (Morse, 2015; Morse, Lowery, & Steury, 2014; Yin, 2014). Building a strong working relationship is vital for effective qualitative research (Guillemin et al., 2016; Le Roux, 2016; Wolgemuth et al., 2015). I established a working relationship by ensuring the participants were comfortable throughout the research process by employing consistent communication via phone and email. Collins and Cooper (2014) indicated that developing relationships with participants is essential. Researchers may find data collection impeded if there is no working relationship between the participant and the researcher (Mayer, 2015). I provided a copy of the informed consent form via email to the selected participants to review before the scheduled interview.

Research Method and Design

The research method was qualitative, and the design was multiple case study. I chose the research method and design based on the nature of the topic. Researchers use the qualitative method to capture the holistic and real-world perspective regarding the phenomenon (Yin, 2014).

Research Method

I used a qualitative method for this study. Researchers use the qualitative method to capture the holistic and real-world perspective regarding the phenomenon (Yin, 2014). The qualitative method involves using and collecting a variety of data (Bailey, 2014; Baskarada, 2014). A researcher using the qualitative method aims to disclose a target audience's range of behavior and perceptions that drive it in relation to specific issues or phenomena (Willgens et al., 2016). The qualitative method was most appropriate for this study, as using the qualitative method allowed me to identify the cognitive views and interpersonal perspectives of the leaders. A researcher using the qualitative research method depends on the text and image data, has unique steps in data analysis, and draws on diverse strategies of inquiry (Bailey, 2014; Baskarada, 2014). Researchers can create ideas for improvements, conduct a phenomenon review, disclose prospective strategic directions, and develop parameters for a qualitative study by employing the qualitative method (Willgens et al., 2016), thus making the qualitative method the most appropriate method for this study. Researchers using the quantitative method test hypotheses and analyze statistical data (Willgens et al., 2016). The purpose of a quantitative study is to emphasize the link between two variables or analyze statistical data (Baskarada, 2014;

Raheim et al., 2016). As the focus of this study was to gain insight through a leader's personal experiences, the quantitative method was inappropriate. A mixed method researcher integrates both quantitative and qualitative methods (Willgens et al., 2016), and using the mixed method can provide complementary interpretations or for expanding on a past theory (Baskarada, 2014; Lewis, 2015). Mixed method was inappropriate, as the focus of this study was on exploring strategies through analysis of the phenomenon using inductive reasoning.

Research Design

I used a multiple case study design for this study. Researchers use case study designs to gain an in-depth analysis of the population and ask exploratory questions (Baskarada, 2014; Willgens et al., 2016). The overarching research question asked *how* or *what*, and the case study design is structured so that the researcher will have no control over behavioral events (Yin, 2014), so case study design was most appropriate for this study. Ethnographic researchers observe a culture and record the people or events over an extended period (Lewis, 2015); the time necessary for this prolonged observance was not feasible for this study. A researcher using the ethnographic design focuses on the significance of an issue through direct field study where the researcher becomes a part of the culture he or she studies (Baskarada, 2014; Yin, 2014), which was not the primary goal of this study. A researcher using the phenomenological design attempts to understand how one or more individuals understand experiencing a phenomenon (Baskarada, 2014), which was not the intent of this study. Phenomenological researchers study lived experiences (Lewis, 2015; Yin, 2014), but this design was not suitable for this study as the purpose was to explore strategies for employee engagement in its normal environment. A researcher using grounded theory focuses on a person's lived experiences or world-views to develop a theory (Baskarada, 2014; Willgens et al., 2016; Yin, 2014), which was not the goal of this study. A researcher using narrative design focuses on collecting individuals' stories on a phenomenon and then places them in chronological order for drawing conclusions (Saxena, 2017; Yin, 2014) and typically addresses oppressed societies (Baskarada, 2014). Since the focus of this study was on strategies small business leaders use to motivate employees and increase employee engagement, a case study design was most appropriate.

Population and Sampling

The population for this research study included small business leaders or managers based in the southwestern United States. Participants included small business leaders based on purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is common in qualitative research, and a researcher using this sampling method can select the participants and sites that will allow for in-depth information on the research problem (Elo et al., 2014; Mayer, 2015).

Qualitative researchers determine sample size through data saturation (Ando, Cousins, & Young, 2014; Saxena, 2017). Sample size guidelines remain elusive for qualitative studies (Cleary et al., 2014; Elo et al., 2014; Yin, 2014). Sample size is typically small for qualitative research because generalizability of the findings is not the focus (Elo et al., 2014; Saxena, 2017). A qualitative researcher can achieve data saturation with a sample size between five and 50 participants (Saxena, 2017; Yin, 2014).

I achieved data saturation after interviewing five participants. An adequate sampling size supports in establishing the correct number of participants to certify data saturation is achieved and no new information is discovered (Saxena, 2017). The interview setting for this study was comfortable for the participants. Participants chose the time and location of the interviews. Past research indicates that the data collection quality is higher when participants feel at ease (Ando et al., 2014; Cleary et al., 2014). The information I gathered from the interviews, direct observations and company employee initiative documents provided valuable data on organizational employee engagement strategies and initiatives. The findings of this study can reveal strategies business leaders can use to increase employee engagement.

Ethical Research

I followed all the requirements set forth by the Walden IRB. I sent an email to invite each participant. Upon acceptance, I addressed any concerns with the consent form at that time. All participants provided informed consent before participating in the study (Blease et al., 2016; Ross et al., 2010; Yin, 2014). The consent form detailed the study's purpose and procedures.

Researchers will safeguard the confidentiality of participants and maintain ethical conduct (Belmont Report, 1979; Northway, Howarth, & Evan, 2015; Ross et al., 2010). Protecting participants was of utmost importance during the data collection. The interviews occurred in a location convenient for the participants and lasted approximately 25 to 30 minutes. Participants could withdraw from the interview at any time by contacting the researcher through email or telephone. It is common for researchers not to provide incentives for participating in studies (Ando et al., 2014; Namageyo-Funa, Brace, Christiana, Fowles, & Davies, 2014). There were no repercussions for withdrawing from the study, and there were no incentives for participation.

I coded all information received from the participants to protect their identities and maintain confidentiality. An ethical standard should be applied to all conversations, written communications, and electronic communication to ensure the protection of the participant's information and to establish trust between the researcher and participants (Johnson, 2014; Northway et al., 2015; Ross et al., 2010). IRB approval (Approval #02-19-18-0551986) will ensure that I include all the needed elements to protect the participants. I studied the regulations and guidelines set forth by the National Institute of Health Office of Extramural Research and received certification required to conduct research involving human subjects.

I will maintain the data collected for the study on a USB drive, in a secured cabinet for 5 years, under my sole control to safeguard the confidentiality of the participants. The files on the USB were password protected to mitigate unauthorized access. Participants' names were filed using a coding system to ensure confidentiality. A common practice for researchers is to use coding systems to ensure confidentiality of the participants (Belmont Report, 1979; Johnson, 2014; Yin, 2014). The USB, electronic data, and all paper documents will be destroyed after 5 years. No data collection for this study occurred before receiving IRB approval.

Data Collection Instruments

As the researcher of a qualitative study, I was the data collection instrument. In qualitative research, the researcher acknowledges the researcher is to be the research instrument (Raheim et al., 2016; Yin, 2014). I asked six open-ended interview questions to attain participants' experiences and perceptions of strategies and methods leaders use to engage employees. Yin (2014) stated interviews are one of the most valuable tools in research studies for data collection. The interview protocol, located in Appendix A, served as a guide for all interviews. There are six main sources qualitative researchers can use to gather data for case studies. The six sources are documentation, direct observation, archival records, participant-observation, interviews, and physical artifacts (Yin, 2014).

Researchers typically use semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions for qualitative research (Mallawarachchi, Herath, & Fernando, 2014; Yin, 2014). In preparation for the interviews, I reviewed the interview material beforehand. The interviews were audio recorded to ensure accuracy during transcription. I took minimal notes during the interview so that I could watch the participant's body language. Bailey (2014) indicated that listening is a very crucial skill for interviewers.

I added my notes while I transcribed the audio recordings. The validity and reliability of a study increase through proper organization of the data (Bailey, 2014). I used member checking to confirm the credibility of the data collected. Participant confirming the data provided through member checking adds to the credibility of the study (Harvey, 2015; Simpson & Quigley, 2016). I followed the process of delivering a summation or restatement to each participant of their responses and asked that they verify or correct my interpretation.

Data Collection Technique

The primary data collection technique for this study was face to face interviews. The interviews aligned with the interview protocol located in Appendix A. The use of the interview setting permitted participants to have detailed conversations on the topic that may lead to other discussion points (Harvey, 2015; Saxena, 2017). One of the primary methods of data collection for qualitative researchers is interviews (Bailey, 2014; Saxena, 2017). According to Yin (2014), a negative aspect of face to face interviews is the potential distance to the interview location, and nervousness participants may feel during the interview that has the potential to skew the data. A few other disadvantages of using interviews as primary data collection tool are researcher bias, misaligned interview questions, and dishonest responses from participants (Bailey, 2014; Harvey, 2015; Saxena, 2017). The advantages of using interviews as the data collection tool are detailed data on personal feelings and perceptions, ability to observe nonverbal responses during the interview, and ability to clear up incomplete answers (Bailey, 2014). After approval from IRB, I conducted the interviews using the appropriate interview questions, listening for clarity, mitigating of personal bias, note taking and using a cellphone as a preapproved recording device.

Researchers should use member checking to confirm the accurateness of the information attained from participants in the study (Bailey, 2014; Simpson & Quigley, 2016; Yin, 2014). Participants verified the researcher’s summations of their answers and analysis of the organizational documents relating to employee engagement strategies through member checking (Bailey, 2014; Harvey, 2015; Yin, 2014). I used member checking as the method participants used to authenticate the accuracy of my summation of their responses and experiences. The reliability of a qualitative study can be increased using member checking (Saxena, 2017). The method I followed was to restate or summarize the participants' accounts and views and ask them to confirm or amend my interpretation. Participants had an opportunity to check for any misinterpretation of their responses and to ensure I captured each participant's intended viewpoints.

I asked each participant for company documents and records about employee engagement strategies. The use of secondary information will promote increased validity and improve data saturation in the research process (Bailey, 2014; Saxena, 2017; Yin, 2014). I augmented data collected in the interviews with company documents or archival records. Researchers can achieve methodological triangulation by augmenting data collected in the interviews with company documents or archival records (Bailey, 2014; Saxena, 2017; Yin, 2014).

Data Organization Technique

Semi-structured interviews were the main data collection technique used for this study. The secondary source of information was documentation of all employee engagement programs from the participating small businesses. Yin (2014) recommended using a filing or electronic methodology to organize and maintain information. I will keep all digitally recorded interviews, organizational records, and field notes safe and secure, accessible by only the researcher for 5 years.

The use of audit trails promotes reliability of the research (Bailey, 2014; Saxena, 2017; Yin, 2014). The interviewees received an assigned identifier with an alphanumeric code known only to the researcher. I will keep the audio recordings of the interviews confidential and secure. After the 5-year period from collection, I will destroy all the digital and paper data collected from the interviews.

Data Analysis

Researchers tend to use open-ended interview questions during data collection in a qualitative study (Yin, 2014; Yu et al., 2014). I used the interview protocol located in Appendix A during the interview process, and I asked each participant the same interview questions. In addition to the data collected from the interviews, I collected data from company documents to achieve methodological triangulation. There are four types of triangulation. According to Yin (2014), the types of triangulation are methods of triangulation, data source triangulation, analyst triangulation, and theory triangulation. Combing several sources of data to gain a better understanding of the topic is data source triangulation (Yin, 2014; Yu et al., 2014). The purpose of my data analysis was to find themes and answer the main research question of this study. Data analysis is considered the most vital component of qualitative research (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006).

I transcribed the interview recording and analyzed for reoccurring themes. Researchers should use member checking after analysis of the data has occurred to confirm the accurateness of the information attained from participants in the study (Bailey, 2014; Saxena, 2017; Yin, 2014). I uploaded the transcribed interview data and audio recordings into the data analysis software NVivo. Data analysis software, like

NVivo, is vital for locating trends and common themes in the collected data (Cronin, 2014; Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012). I used the data analysis software's query function to identify the emerging themes from the data collected. After identifying employee engagement strategies, I compared the strategies to previous literature findings. Researchers should identify the similarities in data themes and patterns to those in the existing literature (Cronin, 2014). I organized the data based on the noted themes and patterns.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Validity, reliability and data quality will support the dependability of a case study (Hadi & Closs, 2016; Yazan, 2015). Dependability is related to the quality of a study in qualitative research (Baskarada, 2014; Hadi & Closs, 2016; Yin, 2014). I followed the interview protocol for each interview. After the interviews, each participant reviewed their transcript for any discrepancies; typically referred to as transcript review. The use of transcript review and member checking will increase the dependability of my results. Researchers have indicated that there is a vast assortment of appropriate data quality dimensions. Relevant data dimensions include succinct and reliable representation, interpretability, accurateness, objectivity, reputation, ease of understanding, believability, and relevancy (Baskarada, 2014; Yazan, 2015).

I used the data source triangulation method introduced by Stake to increase the dependability of my case study. Stake's four strategies are data source, investigator, theory, and methodology triangulation (Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2014). Researchers must differentiate between dependability of a method to have comparable interpretations and reliability of a method to produce similar outcomes (Baskarada, 2014; Yazan, 2015). I also enhanced the dependability of my data results by using member checking.

Validity

Credibility is vital to qualitative research (Baskarada, 2014; Yin, 2014). A researcher uses credibility to evaluate if there is a connection to the originating data source and the researcher's interpretation (Simpson & Quigley, 2016). Research validity and reliability are deemed to be interchangeable concepts in quantitative research, but validity and reliability are also relevant for qualitative research as all researchers must build creditability (Baskarada, 2014; Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2014). In addition to the interview data, I collected and reviewed company documents. The methodological triangulation of these two data sources and member checking increased the credibility of the results.

The use of data source triangulation will strengthen the internal validity and creditability of a case study (Baskarada, 2014; Hadi & Closs, 2016; Yin, 2014). Researchers use triangulation to confirm that the information collected is reliable by confirming the validity of the data with several sources (Baskarada, 2014; Hadi & Closs, 2016; Yin, 2014). I collected data from several owners of small to medium businesses through face-to-face interviews and other company documents related to employee engagement strategies. I was the data collection instrument for this qualitative study, therefore; the credibility of this study is based off my protocols, procedures, and self-awareness throughout the research process.

Validity covers dependability, credibility, trustworthiness, and transferability (Baskarada, 2014; Yin, 2014). Transferability is defined as the findings being applicable to a similar context or situation and still preserving the connotations and interpretations from a completed study (Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2014). Transferability is not whether the study includes a representative sample but rather how well the study made it possible for another researcher to decide if similar methods could succeed in their situation through a thorough understanding of how it occurred in the context of the original research (Yazan, 2015). The depth and level of the detail in the background and the context of the findings assist the reader in making decisions on transferability (Yin, 2014). I included substantial, rich descriptions in my findings to enable readers the ability to evaluate the potential transferability appropriateness for their situation.

Confirmability refers to the impartiality and correctness of the information (Simpson & Quigley, 2016). I documented all procedures used in this study to ensure confirmability. Simpson and Quigley (2016) stated the process for establishing confirmability and dependability are similar. Researchers can ensure confirmability in a study by ensuring that the findings resulted from the research and not from prejudices of the researcher (Munn et al., 2014). I used member checking in this study to ensure confirmability.

Data saturation occurs when little to no changes to the already noted themes and codes occurs (Morse, 2015; Morse et al., 2014; Yin, 2014). Data saturation is an important methodological concept for qualitative research (Morse et al., 2014; Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) asserted sample size should be large enough that the researcher can attain repetitive responses, and Morse, Lowery, and Steury (2014) contended data collection should stop when the researcher is confident there are no new themes. I ensured data saturation by exploring the participants’ responses until no new information developed from the dialogue.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 contained significant information on the research design and method, the role of the researcher, and participants of this study. I used a qualitative method and multiple case study design for this study. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies some small business leaders use to increase employee engagement. I supported my decisions by detailing confidentiality and ethics. I also assured the reliability and validity of research with the use of member checking and triangulation. Section 2 ended with a discussion on the methods and techniques I used to ensure reliability and validity of my study. The use of transcript review and member checking increased the dependability of my results. I was the data collection instrument for this qualitative study, therefore; the credibility of this study is based off my protocols, procedures, and self-awareness throughout the research process. Section 3 includes the findings of the study, recommendations for future research and to address the gaps in the literature on employee engagement.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that small business leaders use to increase employee engagement. The population for the research study included five small business leaders in four small businesses located in the southwestern United States. Small business leaders often lack the knowledge on how to increase employee engagement. I collected data using semistructured interviews and documentation on employee initiatives review. I used member checking and methodological triangulation using document review of organizational policies and initiatives on employee engagement to strengthen the study's reliability and validity. I verified that all five participants had implemented employee engagement strategies and worked in a small business.

The conceptual framework of Weber's organizational theory guided the node assignation, which led to group formation and the recognition of overarching themes. Participants agreed that implementation of employee engagement strategies was vital to increase productivity and organizational effectiveness. In the process of assimilating data and thematic coding, three themes emerged from this study: honest and effective communication, supportive leadership behavior, and implementing employee engagement practices into the business culture and practice. The results of the study were in alignment with the principles of organizational theory that I explored during the literature review. In the following section, I discuss in detail my analysis and study findings.

Presentation of the Findings

The objective of this qualitative multiple case study was to answer the central research question: What strategies do small business leaders use to increase employee engagement? To answer this research question, I used semistructured interview questions reflecting the philosophies of organizational theory. The interview questions were open-ended to permit the research participants to discover what strategies they employed to sustain and grow their employees' engagement. I anticipated the initial participant size to be seven; however, only five agreed to participate. I assigned each participant a unique code (i.e., P1, P2) to maintain their confidentiality. The data coding consisted of keywords and common terms that emerged from the interview transcripts and archived secondary data sources. My analysis of the interview replies, field notes, and documentation collected from the five study participants involved the 5-step process Yin (2014) defined as entailing (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting, and (e) concluding.

Data analysis uncovered that small business leaders' main obstacles to sustaining and growing their business profitably were lack of communication, employee initiatives, and perceived leadership support. This finding was in line with the literature from Bedarkar and Pandita (2014), which indicated obstacles to enhance the performance of employees include limited communication and lack of institutional or leader support. Furthermore, the data analysis revealed small business leaders' strategy to overcome these barriers were working their available resources efficiently to keep employees engaged while maintaining attractive employee programs to retain staff. There is limited literature concerning the strategies small business leaders apply to maintain and increase employee engagement. However, this new study result was consistent with Lamprakis, Alamani, Marriari, and Grivas (2018), who determined that to maintain a sustainable profit, small business leaders need to acquire the resources necessary to enhance employee incentives by creating resources that are unique and difficult to replicate by opponents. In alignment with that principle, three major themes emerged from data analysis regarding strategies to sustain employee engagement: (a) honest and effective communication, (b) supportive leadership behavior, and (c) implementing employee engagement practices into the business culture and practice. In the following subsections, I discuss each major theme as a comparison and contrast to the main literature review themes.

Theme 1: Honest and Effective Communication

The first theme that emerged from data collection analysis was honest and effective communication. The literature review and organizational theory conceptual framework support this theme. In the literature review, I analyzed how communication affected organizational operations and employee engagement. The theme honest and effective communication aligns with the division of workforce and centralized authority part of the conceptual framework. Communication is a tool that successful leaders use to encourage employee engagement while achieving organizational goals.

Five participants (100%) indicated that honest and effective communication is a key strategy for increasing employee engagement. Karanges, Johnston, Beatson, and Lings (2015) indicated that clear and concise communication is vital to employee engagement and organizational success. The participants indicated that various methods of communication are effective, but each participant agreed that face-to-face communication is the most effective. P3 stated, “How can we require our staff do their best if we (management) cannot clearly communicate our expectations.” P5 stated, “Our business will not succeed without clear communication. So, all leaders/managers should attend periodic communication training.” All participants in this study were given the opportunity to confirm the need for communication. The participants shared the various ways effective communication was used throughout their organization. Through document review, I observed P2 and P5’s email messages and handwritten memos to employees that encouraged new ideas and process changes, and P4 provided me with notes from staff dropped off in suggestion boxes. Review of these documents supported the theme of hones and effective communication.

The results of this study aligned with the literature. Karanges et al. (2015) and Mishra et al. (2014) indicated that organizational leaders should communicate often with employees to build trust and confidence. The way leaders communicate can lead to resistance, thus negatively affecting growth and employee engagement (Lamprakis et al., 2018). The division of workforce and centralized authority part of the conceptual framework depends upon organizational leaders’ ability to communicate effectively (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2014). Leadership transparency relates back to Kahn’s three psychological conditions for engagement and organizational theory, mostly on how employees need to feel included and see the purpose of their job. Haviland (2014) stated that trust, shared goals, and a shared language or communication vehicle are vital for organizational success. Therefore, employees perceiving trust between leaders and employees will emulate their leader's behavior. Organizational theory provided the idea of employee engagement as a supporting component of the theory; I presented a clear relationship between employee engagement and the engagement initiatives of small business leaders.

Theme 2: Supportive Leadership Behavior

The second theme to emerge from the data collection analysis was supportive leadership behavior. The literature review and organizational theory conceptual framework support this theme. In the literature review, I analyzed how leadership behavior affected organizational operations and employee engagement. The theme supportive leadership behavior aligns with the division of workforce and rules and regulations part of the conceptual framework. Leadership behavior is a tool that successful leaders use to encourage employee engagement while achieving organizational goals. Data from the organizational websites of P1 and P4 provided useful information on employee-leader relationship through community events, company sponsored retreats, and other social events. Comments posted by employees supported the effect and need of supportive leaders.

Leadership is a key component to organizational sustainability and success (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014; Karanges et al., 2015; Silva, 2014). All five participants indicated the relationship between leader-employee is vital. P1 stated, "Leaders should support their employees. Employees that feel supported exhibit higher levels of engagement." P 4 shared,

> When I began at this company, the tension was evident in every department. Employees were disengaged and many just put in the minimal amount of work/time. So, I set out to build trust and confidence with the employees and always works at leading by example.

These findings were consistent with the literature. Companies that have a positive work environment should have an easier time with encouraging organizational commitment from their employees. Researchers posited that the perceived levels of commitment by leaders impacts employee engagement and commitment (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014; Filipova, 2015; Silva, 2015).

The findings from this study aligned with the literature, indicating employees are most likely to be engaged when they have the opportunity to collaborate and are a part of the decision-making process. Organizational theory's division of labor is the distribution of tasks and encompasses finding the best person for each task or the right person-organizational fit. When leadership focuses on the organizational development efforts that encourage feelings and attitudes of employees as a team, they have achieved a successful organizational fit and culture (Basit & Arshad, 2016; Lian et al., 2014; Prywes, 2011). Thus, leaders should build a culture of trust with their employees. Sadeghi and Pihie (2012) and Karanges et al. (2015) indicated that business leaders build their employee engagement strategies on the employer-employee trust relationship. When employees lack psychological attachment to an organization and leaders, there is a decrease in trust, commitment, and job satisfaction (Dai & Qin, 2016; Osborne & Hammoud, 2017; Ugwu et al., 2014). Leadership behavior relates back to Kahn's three psychological conditions for engagement and organizational theory and how employees need to feel included and see the purpose of their job.

Theme 3: Implementation of Employee Engagement Practices Into the Business Culture and Practice

The third and final theme to emerge from the data collection analysis was implementation of employee engagement practices into the business culture and practice. The literature review and organizational theory conceptual framework support this theme. In the literature review, I analyzed how employee initiatives affected organizational operations and employee engagement. The theme implementation of employee engagement practices into the business culture and practice aligns with the centralized authority and rules and regulations part of the conceptual framework. Organizational culture is a tool that successful leaders use to encourage employee engagement while achieving organizational goals. Through document review, I reviewed all participants' employee engagement initiative. Each participant had an initiative that included good behavior, attendance, and performance recognition.

During the interviews, each participant indicated that incentives or rewards are vital to employee engagement. Four participants (80%) indicated that it was important to have an organizational culture that encourages the recognition of jobs well done. In small businesses, employee behavior and interactions with coworkers have an enormous impact on service quality and the wellbeing and health of each other (Jofreh et al., 2014; Maymand et al., 2017). The organizational culture is critical and is a key factor in how employees conduct themselves at work. The incentives could include salary increases, one-time cash rewards, time off work, and tuition reimbursement. P2 stated, “Permanent salary increases are not always feasible due to budget constraints, but time off is just as appreciated by employees.” All five participants said they make sure to always thank and praise employees for jobs well done. P 3 stated, “I try to write personalized thank-you cards. My staff seems to really appreciate them.”

All five participants stated that employees tend to outperform when they are clear about job roles and expectations. Providing clear job roles, clear expectations, and rewards impact engagement (Jena et al., 2017; Ruck et al., 2017; Ugwu et al., 2014; Valentin et al., 2015). Thus, clear job roles and expectations satisfy Weber’s centralized authority and rules and regulations conditions in organizational theory (Haviland, 2014; Jain & Rajput, 2017; Xiaoying & Albrow, 2016). These findings aligned with the literature. An employee’s sense of belonging, or organizational fit, affects their job performance, interaction with coworkers, and organizational commitment (Afsar & Bashir, 2016; Memon et al., 2015). According to Basit and Arshad (2016), organizational incentives are tools leaders can use to increase an employee’s perceived organizational fit. Furthermore, when leaders establish an environment that rewards for engagement, increased levels of employee engagement are achieved (Howell, 2017; Iddagoda & Opatha, 2017; Yildiz & Yildiz, 2016).

The findings of this study aligned with the significance of the study and to the conceptual framework. The themes that emerged increased the understanding of employee engagement in this qualitative, multiple case study and helped answer the purpose of the study and overarching research question. P 2 stated,

> At a previous business I worked for, our turnover rate was shameful. Employees did not feel valued, and there were no incentives in place. So, they left at an alarming rate. This organization saw the importance of having an engaged workforce and worked hard at implementing the programs and incentives that are currently in place.

This study has added to the knowledge of strategies small business leaders could use to increase employee engagement in their organizations. The focus of organizational theory is on the division of workforce, centralized authority, and rules and regulations of the organizations (Chavance, 2012; Pryor et al., 2011). Division of labor is the distribution of tasks and encompasses finding the best person for each task, or the right person-organizational fit. Centralized authority relates to establishing clear lines of authority and using leaders to motivate employees. Organizational rules and regulations are the predetermined processes in which an organization is set up to operate. Therefore, employees are most productive and more likely to stay when they are engaged in their work, trust their leadership, and have aligned themselves with organizational goals (McManus & Mosca, 2015; Mishra et al., 2014; Shuck & Reio, 2014). If an employee perceives they found their organizational fit, it fulfills the meaningfulness aspect of Kahn’s psychological condition and Weber’s organizational theory (Breevaart et al., 2014; Chavance, 2012; Haviland, 2014). Leaders should provide purpose, improve operations, and direction to their employees to increase employee engagement and organizational success (Iddagoda & Opatha, 2017; Schaufeli, 2015). These findings contributed to effective practices that can improve a business' performance when employees actively engage in their jobs.

Applications to Professional Practice

The study results revealed honest and effective communication, supportive leadership behavior, and implementing employee engagement practices into the business culture and practice as the top strategies small business owners use to sustain and increase employee engagement. These results may facilitate the foundation for recommendations for strategic actions as well as further research studies. Furthermore, the findings may improve business practice by promoting and facilitating the growth of employee engagement guidelines or training materials for small business leaders. Small business leaders need access to the right tools to operate efficiently and produce a profit (Kang & Busser, 2018). Small business leaders are negatively affected by employee disengagement (Shehri, McLaughlin, Al-Ashaab, & Hamad, 2017). Consequently, it is vital for small business leaders to apply organizational strategies that foster employee engagement and improves profits with the resources they have available (Kang & Busser, 2018). Low profitability or decreased employee engagement is due to a lack of knowledge of effective leadership strategies.

The results of the study may help to fill in the gap of knowledge regarding what strategies influence employee engagement. Small business leaders may better understand and apply new leadership strategies to improve employee engagement and business performance. Consequently, small business leaders may learn from the findings the best leadership strategies to overcome barriers, human resource limitations, and attain a competitive advantage. Small business leaders may expand the profitability of their business by using the knowledge gained from this study. Moreover, this study may be of use to a business if the results help business executives and policymakers design framework for initiatives and policies focused on enhancing the profitability of businesses while improving employee engagement. Finally, this study may promote further research on the business dynamics of employee engagement.

Implications for Social Change

The results of this multiple case study have several implications for social change. An engaged labor force is a vital component of the modern workplace. An engaged labor force creates challenges and opportunities (Kang & Busser, 2018; Karumuri, 2017). The results of this study may serve as the basis for positive social change. Improving employee engagement leads to increased productivity and profits. The employee engagement strategies identified in this study may increase awareness of generational differences in the workplace. Disengaged employees create barriers for leaders and employees (Hanaysha, 2016; Kang & Busser, 2018). Leaders are responsible for guiding employees toward organizational objectives and motivating people to attain organizational success (Karumuri, 2017). Leaders can use the finding of this study to increase their understanding of strategies to motivate their workforce. These results can improve operations and address gaps in organizational effectiveness (Kang & Busser, 2018; Karumuri, 2017). This study provides additional knowledge to the body of research about the strategies leaders may use to motivate and engage their workforce.

Recommendations for Action

Organizational leaders in any business should consider if the findings of this study match with current business initiatives to increase employee engagement and productivity in the workplace. Based on the results of the study, I was able to generate six recommendations small business leaders could consider when employing strategies to increase employee engagement, which also leads to increased productivity. Endorsement of the subsequent steps could increase employee engagement in the workplace.

The first recommendation is to deliver communication in a clear and concise manner. Small business leaders can incorporate monthly meetings organization-wide and set up departmental meetings to allow employees to participate, which will enforce open lines of communication. The second recommendation is team building, which should include a member of each department from all ranks or affected parts necessary to address the scope of a project. This recommendation aligns with creating employee engagement practices into business culture and practice. Creating teams allows all ranks of employees the opportunity to participate and fosters an environment of diversity and creativity. Employee engagement is the satisfaction and excitement an employee feels when engaging in the workplace (Hanaysha, 2016; Kang & Busser, 2018).

The third recommendation is encouraging leader-employee relationship/partnership to form a culture of trust and support. This recommendation aligns with the supportive leadership behavior theme. The fourth recommendation is to create an engagement strategy team that includes leaders, office staff, and all levels of employees to create and implement strategies to increase engagement. Sources agreed creating a culture of engaging employees appeared to foster an engaged workforce within an organization through the level of commitment exhibited (Chaudhary, 2017; Zhong, Wayne, & Liden, 2016). This recommendation aligns with creating employee engagement practices into business culture and practice. The fifth recommendation is to establish a committee entailing different levels of employees to create activities and programs within the business to foster supportive associations. This recommendation supports supportive leadership behavior and implementing employee engagement practices into business culture and practice themes. The sixth recommendation is to develop an employee recognition program organization-wide to foster a culture and business practice of commending employees for jobs well done.

Business leaders at all levels in any industry who wishes to increase employee engagement should pay attention to the results of this study. Human resource administrators who are considering new methods to recruit and retain qualified employees should consider the findings of this study. Future doctoral students compiling research may find the finding from this study helpful. Walden University scholarly works disseminates the results of this study for academic purposes. I might circulate the findings through future training with various organizations interested in ways to increase employee engagement and possibly through presentations to teach others about the importance of employee engagement.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies successful small business leaders use to improve employee engagement. I selected five small business leaders located in the southwestern United States for this study who: (a) have management experience within a small to medium business, (b) the small business is in the southwestern United States, (c) the participant is at least 18 years old, and (d) experience developing strategies to increase employee engagement. The results of the research resulted in numerous themes that identified positive employee engagement strategies. Future researchers can develop the identified themes for this topic in different geographical locations. Other studies in different locations can further validate the themes identified in this study for business leaders who want to implement these successful strategies to increase employee engagement.

One limitation of this study was the varying experience level of the small business leaders. One measure in this study was that all participants had at least ten years of experience. However, the criterion did not exclude different experiences with employee engagement strategies based on the previous types of work. Future researchers should include additional criterions to or seek participants with similar experiences. To narrow the scope of a study, future researchers can include participants with similar experiences. Additionally, future researchers can expand on one theme to identify the details of implementation of this successful strategy to alleviate decreases in engagement.

Reflections

This journey proved to be both a challenging and difficult experience, but I welcomed every second of it. I learned how to be a better researcher and scholar through this journey. I had the opportunity to learn how to critically think through a problem and expand my knowledge about a topic I wanted to research. I had the opportunity to learn about successful employee engagement strategies to mitigate employee disengagement and decreases in production. Through purposive sampling, I recruited qualified participants that added value to my research. Conducting interviews proved challenging because of numerous scheduling conflicts. After completing the interviews, I see why each participant was successful**.**

My knowledge of employee engagement expended through this doctoral research process. I set aside my personal biases about leadership behaviors and kept an open mind throughout the data collection process. I kept up my passion for the study and appreciative of each participant. The findings of this study were in line with what I expected and did not change my perception of employee engagement. I had limited knowledge of the themes my research would uncover. I am glad I pursued studying employee engagement strategies. The results heightened my appreciation and understanding of the daily obligations of leaders to employee engagement.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies small business leaders use to increase employee engagement. Employee engagement is a vital factor in organizational sustainability. The use of employee engagement strategies is critical to an organization's competitive advantage and sustainability. Less than 20% of employees experience work engagement, which causes adverse consequences to organizations (Fox et al., 2017; Valentin et al., 2014). Leaders are required to establish and keep up a productive and effective labor force. However, some leaders lack strategies to engage their workforce. Small business leaders must comprehend the goals, values, and beliefs of their organization and employees to engage and motivate effectively (Zhong et al., 2016).

Through analyzation of the literature, analysis of the interviews and company documents for themes, I was able to explore strategies to increase employee engagement. Small business leaders should focus on honest and effective communication, supportive leadership behavior, and implement employee engagement practices into the business culture and practice to maintain success. The themes derived from the study indicated that the use of organizational theory is effective for employee engagement strategies. When small business leaders invest some time and effort in their employees, it builds a relationship of trust that can increase an employee's engagement. Small business leaders that use a consistent communication method and engagement practices to provide the best work culture to their employees can increase that employee's engagement and their desire to achieve organizational goals.

Five small business leaders from businesses in the southwestern United States participated in semistructured interviews as well as member checking and observation. After collecting and analyzing data, three main themes emerged from the data: honest and effective communication, supportive leadership behavior, and implementing employee engagement practices into the business culture and practice. These results show that there are certain strategies leaders can implement to increase employee engagement. It is vital small business leaders understand which strategies are best to maximize employee engagement and positively affect their organization. Additionally, regular review and modification of these strategies are encouraged to ensure continued success.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

I. Introduce self to participant(s).

II. Present consent form, go over contents, answer questions and concerns of participant(s).

III. Give participant copy of consent form.

IV. Turn on recording device.

V. Follow procedure to introduce participant(s) with pseudonym/coded identification; note the date and time.

VI. Begin interview with question #1; follow through to final question.

VII. Follow up with additional questions.

VIII. End interview sequence; discuss member-checking with participant(s).

IX. Thank the participant(s) for their part in the study. Reiterate contact numbers for follow up questions and concerns from participants.

X. End protocol.

Appendix B: Letter of Invitation

Invitation to participate in the research project titled: “Leadership Strategies to Increase Employee Engagement”

Dear (Potential Participant),

We are conducting interviews as part of a research study to increase our understanding of leadership strategies Small-Business leaders use to increase employee engagement. As a Small Business leader, you are in an ideal position to give us valuable firsthand information from your own perspective.

The interview takes around 30 minutes and is very informal. We are simply trying to capture your thoughts and perspectives as Small Business leader on strategies you’ve used to increase employee engagement. Your responses to the questions will be kept confidential. Each interview will be assigned an alpha/numeric code to help ensure that personal identifiers are not revealed during the analysis and write up of findings.

There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will be a valuable addition to our research and findings could lead to greater public understanding employee engagement.

If you are willing to participate, please reply to this email indicating so and I will send an email with further details on the research study. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Thanks!
Christine Garza
Walden University