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Exploring Strategies Leaders Use to Engage Employees

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Abstract

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MS, University of Mary, 2012

BA, Benedictine College, 2009

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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December 2018

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative, single case study was to explore strategies that leaders used to engage employees. The conceptual framework for this study was Saks's multidimensional approach to employee engagement. Semistructured interviews were conducted with 5 leaders from an office design company in the midwestern region of the United States who had a minimum of 2 years of experience of engaging employees. Company archival documents related to employee engagement were also collected. Data analysis consisted of compiling the data, coding for emergent and a priori codes, disassembling the data into common codes, reassembling the data into themes, interpreting the meaning, and reporting the themes. Seven themes emerged from data analysis: (a) communication, (b) employee involvement, (c) employee development, (d) top-down approach with manager buy in, (e) flexibility with time, (f) tailored strategies for different demographics, and (g) engagement with the workspace/environment. The implications of this study for positive change are that organizational leaders can incorporate these strategies to engage employees to achieve a competitive edge over competition. Engaged employees could benefit local communities and could have the flexibility to participate in community activities and foster positive social change.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to my family. My inspiration arose from the desire to set a good example for my children, Xander and Jillian. Remember that you can do anything that you set your mind to.

Acknowledgments

A very special thank you to my wife, Stacy, I could not have done this without your love and support. Thank you to Dr. Richard Snyder for your assistance as I began my study. Also, a big thanks to my second committee member, Dr. Beverly Muhammed, and URR, Dr. Denise Land, for your guidance. Last, but definitely not least, thank you to Dr. Sarah Matthey. Without any doubt, I can say that I would not be writing this acknowledgement without your guidance and support.

Table of Contents

Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Leaders must use effective strategies to engage employees. Employee engagement has many positive outcomes for an organization (Geldenhuys, Laba, & Venter, 2014). Further, leaders who engage employees may alleviate turnover problems in an organization (Shuck & Reio, 2014) and increase employee performance (Anitha, 2014). With an effective approach to employee engagement, organizations may gain a substantial economic edge over their competition (Anitha, 2014). Employers who engage employees in their job duties will make more efficient organizations.

Background of the Problem

Employee engagement may be a significant factor in business success and achieving a competitive workforce. The degree to which employees are engaged with their work affects their behavior, effort, commitment, job performance, and productivity (Anitha, 2014). There is a personal benefit to working while being fully engaged (Shuck & Reio, 2014). Leaders should address employee motivation and employees not working at their maximum potential (Shuck & Reio, 2014). Additionally, employers can focus on corporate social responsibility (CSR) to increase employee engagement because CSR has been found to impact employee engagement positively (Chaudhary, 2017). Leaders need to identify, test, and implement new strategies to improve employee motivation and engagement.

Researchers have examined factors that influence employee engagement strategies. Scholars have addressed both intrinsic and extrinsic factors concerning employee engagement (Delaney & Royal, 2017). However, employees may believe that

intrinsic factors are more important and lead to enhanced employee engagement (Menges, Tussing, Wihler, & Grant, 2017). Leaders must identify what motivates a certain group, such as younger workers, to inspire employees with different engagement factors.

Problem Statement

Employee performance is driven by employee engagement (Anitha, 2014). In a study of 506 employees from 35 hospitals, only 11.22% of respondents reported as being in the high/full engagement category (Swaminathan, Keerthi, & Ananth, 2016). The general business problem is that less engaged employees have a negative effect on some companies' ability to remain competitive. The specific business problem is that some organizational leaders lack strategies to improve employee engagement.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, single case study was to explore strategies that organizational leaders used to improve employee engagement. The population was comprised of leaders in an office design corporation in the midwestern United States who had implemented effective employee engagement strategies. The outcomes of this study contribute to positive social change by linking employee engagement strategies to employees' work-life balance and general happiness. Failure to enjoy a job could have a significant impact on the overall enjoyment people have in their lives. Increased understanding of how employee engagement affects an organization can increase productivity, foster a healthier work environment, and positively impact the wellbeing of employees.

Nature of the Study

Researchers use various methods to conduct scholarly research. Qualitative researchers gather in-depth data, discover meaning in what is unknown, and reconstruct the stories of participants on a conceptual level (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In this study, I employed the qualitative approach, conducting semistructured interviews with leaders of an office design corporation and reviewing internal and public documents from the corporation to explore effective strategies for engaging employees. Quantitative research is statistical, and quantitative researchers examine relationships among variables (Bernard, 2012). I did not choose the quantitative method because I did not numerically measure employee engagement strategies used by the organization's leaders. The mixed-methods approach is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods into a single study (Yin, 2014). I did not choose a mixed-methods study because it contains a quantitative portion, and I only used the qualitative method to explore individual experiences.

I chose a case study design for this study. Case study scholars explore a phenomenon using evidence from multiple sources explore competing explanations of a phenomenon (Yin, 2014). Case studies are a precise, bounded system used to decipher or explore a phenomenon through scholarly inquiry (Stake, 1995). A single case study design was appropriate for this study because it allowed me to conduct an in-depth analysis of the leadership strategies used to engage employees from an organization, yielding results bounded to a particular type of business industry. Other qualitative designs I considered—ethnography and narrative—were not appropriate for this study. In

an ethnographic design, a scholar focuses on external cultural effects (McNabb, 2015), which would not have allowed me to capture the internal process of leaders' strategies for implementing effective employee engagement. A narrative researcher focuses on the lives of individuals as told through their own stories (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). By focusing on individual lives, I would not have been able to understand how leaders use employee engagement strategies in their businesses.

Research Question

The overarching research question for this study was: What strategies do organizational leaders use to improve employee engagement?

Interview Questions

1. How do you approach employee engagement?

2. What are strategies do you use to improve employee engagement?

3. What barriers exist that hinder or prevent employee engagement strategy implementation?

4. How do you overcome barriers to employee engagement strategy implementation?

5. What strategies do you use to recognize disengaged employees?

6. What strategies do you implement to engage an employee to improve his or her performance?

7. What strategies do you use to correct the work environment once adversely affected by disengaged employees?

8. What additional information would you like to provide that you have not already addressed?

Conceptual Framework

For the conceptual framework of this study, I followed Saks's (2006) multidimensional approach. Kahn inspired Saks through a pioneering study on employee engagement published in 1990. Saks stated that employee engagement consists of two distinct components: job engagement (i.e., connection to an employee's direct role) and organizational engagement (i.e., alignment with and acceptance of an organization's culture, values, and mission). Employee engagement strategies should encompass more than an employee's connection to his or her job. Research on employee engagement has increased; however, scholars have not gained a definitive answer on how employee engagement affects organizational outcomes (Saks & Gruman, 2014). I selected this multidimensional approach by Saks because of its inclusion of both job and organizational factors. For this study, I applied this multidimensional approach to understand the selected organization's strategies for engaging employees.

Operational Definitions

Employee engagement: The cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components aligned with employee performance (Saks, 2006).

Job engagement: An employee's attachment to their direct role in an organization; higher engagement correlates with better performance (Saks, 2006).

Organization engagement: An employee's alignment with and acceptance of an organization's culture, values, and mission (Saks, 2006).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions in a study are factors that are unverifiable but can be addressed to increase validity (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This study was based on three basic assumptions. My first assumption was that the participants would provide clear, honest, and unbiased information related to the topic. Another assumption was that the participants would provide adequate responses to interview questions relating to their levels of engagement with their job or workplace. The final assumption was that the participants would take an active role in member checking to ensure that my work was an accurate representation of their approach to employee engagement.

Limitations

A limitation is comprised of biases or weaknesses that limit the transferability of the study (Yin, 2014). This case study had several limitations. First, the participants of a case study influence the outcome of a study, and their potential bias or perception could have affected the results of the study. Another limitation was that the organization had a large operational footprint, limiting the possibility to see all aspects of the business in operation, which could have limited transferability to other geographic areas. The study was also limited to the responses I received from the questions I asked the participants and the willingness of participants to add any additional relevant information.

Delimitations

Delimitations narrow the scope and outline the boundaries of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Determining the scope of a study allows a researcher to focus on the

impact of that research for related applications. The first delimitation was the restriction

to a single organization, which may not capture the extent of employee engagement

strategy application for different entities. I composed the interview questions to focus on

employee engagement strategies used by an office design company to engage their

employees; however, I only used one organization for the case study, which was a

delimitation. Additionally, I excluded input from nonleadership individuals and other

industries.

<div style="text-align:center">Significance of the Study</div>

The results of this case study contribute to the body of knowledge on the topic by

outlining what drives employee engagement. Practitioners may use the findings of this

study to build better strategies to improve engagement. Focused employees are assets to

an organization, and counterproductive employee behavior leads to organizational harm

(Samnani, Salamon, & Singh, 2014). Through a greater understanding of what keeps

employees engaged, employers may counter the negative effects associated with

disengagement before they take place, building stronger organizations.

Contribution to Business Practice

By increasing employee engagement rates, an organization may see positive

changes, from an increase in productivity to lower turnover rates and a better bottom-line.

Employee engagement programs are ongoing efforts that may need adjustments over

time, and the results of this study may help reinforce the positive effects of effective

implementation of employee engagement strategies. The employee engagement field is in

the early stages of an attempt at a consolidation of several different models into a single,

more cohesive approach (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Due to the array of engagement models available, business leaders need to understand how to choose their own strategy.

Implications for Social Change

The positive changes in job and organizational relationships made possible by the findings of this study may create a happier, more fulfilled workforce. Employees who are more engaged at work may experience increased satisfaction in their lives (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). Building and maintaining a highly engaged workforce may result in positive social change. Engaging workers effectively may cultivate a growing sense of purpose and happiness at work, enabling them to create a more positive environment for friends, family, and others they interact with. Outside the organization, engaged employees will also foster these social change benefits in other areas of their personal lives.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

In a literature review, a scholar establishes a conceptual foundation for a study by identifying various perspectives and shortfalls in the current body of knowledge. This literature review will include peer-reviewed articles and scholarly sources on the evolution of employee engagement. I will present the following themes in this review of the professional and academic literature: multidimensional approach to employee engagement, foundational/competing frameworks, employee engagement, gaps in employee engagement literature, benefits of employee engagement, turnover intent, deviant behavior, engagement propensity, employee engagement measurement,

demographic effects, employee engagement and leadership, human resource (HR) development, and strategies for implementation.

My primary sources for this review included peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, books written by experts in their fields, and academic studies in the Walden University Library and Google Scholar. I searched several databases for sources through the Walden Library: ABI/Inform, SAGE, Thoreau, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, EBSCOhost, Academic Search Complete/Premier, and Science Direct. Keywords search terms were *employee engagement, work engagement, job engagement, organizational engagement, psychological engagement, exploratory case study, qualitative research, multidimensional approach to employee engagement,* and *cost of disengagement*. This search produced a profile of 200 relevant sources, with 74 directly contributing to this review. Out of those 74 sources, 97% were peer-reviewed journals, and 89% were published from 2014–2018.

Purpose of Employee Engagement Research

The purpose of employee engagement research is to test, implement, and exploit strategies that improve an organization's effectiveness through highly engaged employees. Employee engagement is an area of study that is full of potential applications to business practice. Scholars previously addressed employee engagement as a component of other research until the work of Kahn (1990). Since then, many scholars have expanded off of Kahn's work to create employee engagement models, including Harter et al. (2002); Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001); and Saks (2006). Other scholars, professional organizations, and government entities have found empirical

evidence on the importance of employee engagement to ensure desirable organizational

outcomes (Dagher, Chapa, & Junaid, 2015; Saxena & Srivastava, 2015). Due to the

potential for positive outcomes and the growing understanding and application of

employee engagement strategies, the practice of employee engagement should be used by

leaders to ensure greater organizational success.

Conceptual Framework: Multidimensional Approach

Job engagement and organizational engagement emerged as two of the most

popular, yet separate, constructs for employee engagement. Saks (2006) included these

constructs in a multidimensional approach to employee engagement. Despite the

connection between the job and organizational engagement, Saks included the two

themes together into a single model. According to Saks, both types of engagement bring

their own subcomponents, allowing them to coexist rather than compete. I built this study

on the multidimensional approach; therefore, understanding how the approach was built

and the extent to which it has been used was important.

The multidimensional model incorporates parts of a fragmented body of literature

on employee engagement. Saks (2006) created a new construct of employee engagement

by tying together the previously prominent models' and expanding upon their cognitive,

emotional, and behavioral components. The previous attempts to explain employee

engagement led to three major constructs preceding Saks's multidimensional approach.

The needs satisfying approach came first, developed by Kahn (1990). Eleven years later,

new interest in employee engagement led to the burnout-antithesis approach by Maslach

et al. (2001). The last attempt to explain employee engagement before Saks was an

alternative to the burnout-antithesis approach, the satisfaction engagement approach, developed by Harter et al. (2002). I will cover each of these models later in the literature review to reveal the natural progression of Saks's approach.

People with no affinity for a company may not operate at their maximum potential. Saks (2006) viewed employee engagement as employees' immersion of personal resources into the work performed and the organization where they do the work. For the immersion into engagement to transpire, an employee must devote his or her entire self to the job and organization. Ford, Myrden, and Jones (2015) determined that meaningfulness, safety, and availability correlate to job engagement, further adding to the validity of the Saks's findings. However, an organization must provide the right conditions to allow an employee to engage effectively.

Job engagement. The first of the two main subcomponents to the multidimensional approach is job engagement. Job engagement results from meaningful work, and it leads to constructive results and increased organizational commitment (Geldenhuys et al., 2014). Geldenhuys et al. (2014) stated that work engagement is related to companies' long-term positive outcomes, which bring meaningfulness to work. Job engagement has a positive relationship with person-job fit, needs-supplies fit (i.e., needs in a job are supported with the right material by an employer), and demand-abilities fit (i.e., employees have the ability to meet the proper tempo and quality of the work; Lu, Wang, Lu, Du, & Bakker, 2014). Many factors affect job engagement; therefore, practitioners and researchers should strive to find the right combination of factors to generate an effective employee engagement strategy.

The three main components of job engagement are physical, emotional, and cognitive. The physical component, referred to in some frameworks as vigor, is the amount of effort an employee can devote over a period without fatigue (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002). The emotional connection to a job is a combination of an employee's psychological investment and sense of significance in the job (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The cognitive component is best shown through examples such as when employees use their total concentration to be become submersed in their work (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Regarding vigor or the physical component of employee engagement, energy is a factor for success (Owens, Baker, Sumpter, & Cameron, 2015). Energy is affected by long hours, change, blending of personal and work life through technology, workload, and risk of job loss (Owens et al., 2015). Cooper-Thomas, Paterson, Stadler, and Saks (2014) found that proactive work behaviors are an antecedent of work engagement rates for employees. High energy employees are more likely to be proactive because they have more energy to spend on proactive efforts. Employee contributions toward organizational goals increase when there are high levels of energy or proactivity.

Managing and cultivating relationships is an aspect of creating an employee engagement strategy. According to Geldenhuys et al. (2014), a positive relationship between an employee and an organization can lead to engaged employees. Relationships with managers, peers, colleagues, and subordinates play a role in employee engagement (Saxena & Srivastava, 2015). These relationships are a consideration for employee engagement strategies because engagement may be hampered by negative attitudes in an

organization. Interactions and relationships with other people in the organization will affect engagement potential. Other people in the workplace are factors in energizing an employee (Owens et al., 2015). People are a prominent part of any work environment; therefore, personal and professional relationships are a concern for the organization.

Employees must have the right skills to be successful in any job, and if they are to become highly engaged, the job must be within their ability to complete. An employee is more likely to be engaged when the activities defined by the job role match an employee's skills and abilities (Heyns & Rothmann, 2018; Saxena & Srivastava, 2015). Jones, Davis, and Thomas (2015) stated that HR personnel can fine-tune practices for hiring employees who are more likely to become engaged. Through the deployment of preemployment hiring techniques that use employee engagement considerations, organizations can screen for employees who are a good fit for their potential role, and therefore, more likely to become engaged.

Requiring too much education for a position that does not need it for success may lead to problems. The relation of employee engagement to education level was found to be insignificant (Rigg, Sydnor, Nicely, & Day, 2014). Regardless, the skillset and education required to complete work functions should be matched appropriately for any employee to avoid other problems. Employers should manage this through the hiring process by fully disclosing position descriptions to job applicants to prevent surprises later on. Many people aspire for one job or another, but having the correct fit is a consideration for individuals and hiring managers alike.

Organization engagement. Engaging with an organization is different from engaging with a job, and leaders may not understand how to link the two. Work is defined as meaningful when a person derives value from completing work tasks that have an inherent purpose (Geldenhuys et al., 2014). Employees who are meaningfully connected to their work will be more engaged with an organization when supported by an organizational strategy that fosters positive commitment (Geldenhuys et al., 2014). Furthermore, employees actively seek meaningfulness to help them continue dedication to their organization (Geldenhuys et al., 2014). Job engagement and organizational engagement are mutually beneficial, but organizational engagement has different antecedents than job engagement; however, combining the two facets of engagement (i.e., organization and job) is the foundation of a multidimensional approach to employee engagement (Saks, 2006). An individual employee's formation of attachment to the organization is just as important as an employee's formation of attachment to an individual role.

Doing work without a purpose may be counterproductive, and the ability to connect work to a higher purpose may alleviate issues related to assigning employees busy work (i.e., work done just for the sake of assigning tasks). Benn, Teo, and Martin (2015) found that aligning organizational goals with individual values had a positive effect on employee engagement. An organization needs to connect an employee's purpose with to the organization to the work they perform.

Organizational commitment and organizational engagement are separate constructs, but they may be predictors of one another. An employee's connection to and

outlook on his or her organization determines organizational commitment (Saks, 2006).

Albdour and Altarawneh (2014) found that the degree of employee commitment can be

predicted by employee engagement. In organizational commitment strategies, leaders

should target the psychological link between employees and their roles (Geldenhuys et

al., 2014). Once this link is established, leaders can encourage organizational

commitment to assist in building higher levels of organizational engagement.

Organizations may find it challenging to help their employees identify with the

organization; therefore, leaders should screen for engagement propensity so future

employees will have more potential to become engaged.

Competing Engagement Theories on Employee Engagement

Several competing frameworks have emerged in the employee engagement field.

In the following subsections, I will briefly contrast the theories competing with Saks's

(2006) multidimensional approach. Each new generation of constructs builds upon the

work originally developed by Kahn (1990), and many researchers have borrowed key

components from other constructs.

Need-satisfying approach. Kahn (1990) developed the initial framework for

employee engagement to explain workers' commitment and involvement in their various

duties at a workplace. Kahn defined engagement in work as an employee devoting their

full self to a particular role that intrinsically and extrinsically motivates them. The idea of

the full self means that employees freely give 100% effort because they want to, rather

than because they must. Kahn further explained engagement as "the simultaneous

employment and expression of a person's preferred self in task behaviors that promote

connection to work and to others, personal presence, and active full role performance" (p. 700). An organization that addresses the state of its workforce will have improved employee connections. Without understanding the environment an employee is in, a manager may have trouble determining how to pursue employee engagement strategies.

There is more than one way to engage an employee. Kahn (1990) hypothesized that an employee can be physically, emotionally, and cognitively engaged. Personal investment, fear of repercussion, and confidence in available resources directly effects employee engagement (Kahn, 1990). In addition, employees' perceptions of procedural justice or general respect of an organization toward an employee may play a role in the effectiveness of employee engagement. Kahn stated that employees must perceive that they have access to resources to get the job done, or they must perceive that they have support elsewhere to get what they need when they need it. Without technical- and resource-based support from the organization, employees cannot do their job; thus, they cannot be expected to become engaged. Kahn's construct was the first one to include employee engagement, and scholars at the time had mixed feelings about the model (Saks, 2006). However, Kahn's testing of this new theory lent credibility to the model.

Burnout-antithesis approach. A leader must understand the difference between burnout (i.e., antiemployee engagement) and employee engagement for effective employee engagement strategy creation. Maslach et al. (2001) created a second early framework for employee engagement, showing employee engagement as the positive antithesis to burnout, which was the leading engagement construct in the early 2000s. The idea of employee engagement as the opposite of burnout may be limited in

application because the model was not designed to explain connections outside of professions working with the public. This attempt to apply burnout only to some professions but not to others presents a gap in the construct. Maslach et al. proposed that burnout is the loss of engagement, and although that may be empirically true, the burnout-antithesis approach was not meant to be a universal model to explain the employee engagement phenomenon. However, burnout literature aligns with high job demands, and work engagement literature aligns with job resources (Bakker, Demerouti, & Sanz-Vergel, 2014). The employee engagement construct had not yet become the focus of multiple professional disciplines.

Scholars' interest in employee engagement resulted in the expansion of employee engagement research into the field of psychology. Maslach et al. (2001) determined that person's mental state in the workplace is affected by exhaustion, cynicism, and ineffectiveness. Maslach et al. defined exhaustion as overextended and depleted emotional and physical resources. Cynicism was defined as negativity or callousness and being detached from work tasks (Maslach et al., 2001). Additionally, Bakker et al. (2014) stated that burnout and work engagement are predictors of success. Finally, ineffectiveness involves feelings of incompetence, underachievement, or poor productivity (Maslach et al., 2001). There is much more to the employee engagement phenomena than burnout theories can explain or account for, which is why employee engagement developed into a separate construct.

Satisfaction engagement approach. It may be helpful to approach employee engagement through a lens of positive psychology. Harter et al. (2002) used a positive

psychology framework to link employee engagement with employees' involvement, satisfaction, and enthusiasm for work. Harter et al. found that employee engagement was connected to better organizational outcomes, which created opportunities for wide-ranging positive effects. Collini, Guidroz, and Perez (2015) stated that organizations should build strategy around improving mission fulfilment and interpersonal relationships to increase engagement. Leaders use the satisfaction engagement approach because it links employee engagement to positive organizational outcomes; however, it does not go into detail on the many nuances that effect employee engagement.

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement was generally a component of other management theories. Beginning with the work of Kahn (1990), the subject of employee engagement began developing as a separate construct. Employee engagement was a controversial topic in the literature for the first 20 years after the work of Kahn. The study of employee engagement is a reemerging phenomenon, and it should be given more attention by scholars and employers, with leaders focusing on engagement in some aspects of work and not others (Jones et al., 2015). There are still areas to clarify concerning employee engagement because scholars have not come to an agreement on the constructs of employee engagement.

There are many employee engagement definitions in the employee engagement literature; however, most follow similar themes. The definitions generally differ only slightly. Employee participation generally concerns the motivation and rationale for participating in a job to improve the workplace, whereas employee engagement generally

refers to participation in a job or workplace in a way that is mutually beneficial to employees and employers. Lu et al. (2014) stated that engaged employees work to fit their job role and to reach their potential, reinforcing the importance of deploying employee engagement strategies. Although there are differences, the basic components of employee engagement are the same.

Organizational leadership should implement employee engagement strategies. Higher levels of employee engagement enhance employee and organizational performance (Medlin & Green, 2014; Mokaya & Kipyegon, 2014). Additionally, Medlin and Green (2014) found that management principles and processes correlated positively with employee engagement levels and are antecedents to engagement. Good leadership, in general, has a positive effect on employee performance, and aggregate employee performance contributes to organizational performance.

Organization leaders may experience difficulty selecting an appropriate employee engagement strategy and following through with proper implementation. However, selection of proper organizational policies and employee engagement strategy can lead to a competitive advantage (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014). Additionally, Kumar and Pansari (2016) found that employee engagement has a positive link to organizational performance. Further, the benefits of employee engagement are a positive workplace environment, interpersonal relationships, and general wellbeing (Anitha, 2014). There are many benefits to an effective employee engagement strategy, which is evident with increased employee performance and or a potential edge over the competition.

Human capital can be leveraged to implement employee engagement strategy effectively. To remain competitive, business leaders must maximize their effectiveness through energetic, engaged, and dedicated employees (Lu et al., 2014). Taneja, Sewell, and Odom (2015) stated that organizations might expand their competitive advantage by increasing their employee engagement strategy. Organizations should invest in a positive image and reputation to increase employee engagement (Taneja et al., 2015). Albrecht, Bakker, Gruman, Macey, and Saks (2015) indicated that there is a correlation between high levels of employee engagement and maintaining a competitive advantage. A competitive advantage may not last, so strategy makers should find ways to cultivate it.

Many components contribute to an organization's competitive advantage, and an employee engagement program may be a cost-effective way to increase performance. Bedarkar and Pandita (2014) stated that highly engaged employees positively affect the organizations they support. Mokaya and Kipyegon (2014) found a correlation between employee engagement and organizational performance management to personal development, growth opportunities, workplace recreation, and remuneration packages. Jeve, Oppenheimer, and Konje (2015) found that employees who engrossed in their work, time passes quickly. Of the many benefits of implementing employee engagement strategy, employers may be most interested in better performance, increased competitive advantage, and less monetary waste.

Employee engagement researchers continue to highlight the potential and actualized outcomes for organizations focusing on engagement strategies. Dagher et al. (2015) surveyed 426 service industry employees to confirm the historical notion of self-

efficacy and employee engagement and found that belief in a person's own capabilities is an effective driver of employee engagement. Carter, Nesbit, Badham, Parker, and Sung (2016) also found a positive correlation between employee engagement and self-efficacy. Management personnel should build the self-efficacy of their employees to improve employee engagement rates.

Competing models for employee engagement often include overlapping categories, but they share the same general themes. According to Saxena and Srivastava (2015), engagement factors are broken down into six categories: other people in the organization, policies and practices, rewards, opportunities, training, and quality of life. Through a survey of 1,250 blue- and white-collar employees (50 HR heads, 600 white-collar employees, and 600 blue-collar employees) from 30 separate manufacturing companies, Saxena and Srivastava found that employee engagement was strongly correlated with organizational culture, open communication, supervisors' empathy toward employees, recognition, autonomy, safety measures, and fair compensation and benefits. Over the last several years, employee engagement scholars have reinforced the correlation between engagement and the above factors (Permana, Tjakraatmadja, Larso, & Wicaksono, 2015). The organizational affects the basic needs, culture, and benefits of an employee engagement strategy.

A first step to initiating strategies for employee engagement may be to introduce self-management strategies. Engaged employees will deploy personal resources, which positively affects work ability (Airila et al., 2014). Breevaart, Bakker, and Demerouti (2014) found that employees who are allowed to practice self-management are more

likely to be engaged. When employees use more self-management strategies, they report higher engagement levels.

Several employee engagement models have indicators that correlate with the ability to predict employee engagement levels. Anitha (2014) found that workplace wellbeing, compensation, team and coworker relationships, and leadership were predictors of employee engagement. Geldenhuys et al. (2014) found that psychological meaningfulness and organizational commitment are positively related to work engagement. Yalabik, van Rossenberg, Kinnie, and Swart (2015) discovered that the best indicator of work engagement is the strength of an employees' organizational commitment. Psychological meaningfulness at work is a determinant factor in an employee's well-being as it relates to the satisfaction they get from their job. Ahmetoglu, Harding, Akhtar, and Chamorro-Premuzic (2015) stated that creative achievement is also a predictor of employee engagement. However, these employee engagement predictors may not extend to all job types. Employee engagement is a complex issue, and this is why many scholars attempt to make it a unique construct. However, being engaged in job functions does not necessarily require psychological meaningfulness or organizational commitment.

There are various degrees of engagement an employee can be classified under, and those classifications may prove rather fluid over time. Anitha (2014) noted three types of engagement measured by Gallup polls and defined them as the following: engaged (strive for excellence), not engaged (do the minimum required), and actively disengaged (work counter to the goals of the organization). HR personnel have a role to

play in managing employee engagement. Work engagement is linked to how well personal abilities are matched with job demands (Lu et al., 2014; Rana, Ardichvili, & Tkachenko, 2014). Employers must understand how best to match employees' abilities with responsibilities. Leaders should consider ability and job fit, and how those will affect employee engagement, for prospective employees. Hiring a person on potential alone could lead to engagement issues when they begin work. Engaged employees have a positive impact. Disengaged employees make only the minimum effort required. Actively disengaged employees can cause problems within the organization.

Organizational leadership should use the predictors of employee engagement across various models. Airila et al. (2014) found that the abilities and engagement level of employees' past work served as predictors of future work ability. Additionally, higher variances in work engagement can be explained by higher variances in job resources (Albrecht, Breidahl, & Marty, 2018; Seppälä et al., 2015). Managers should leverage job resources to reduce employee turnover. An organization may find short-term positive effects by exploiting a small set of employee engagement predictors; however, it is imperative for organizational leaders to revisit any short-term success effects from an engagement strategy.

Gaps in Employee Engagement Literature

Despite the interest in employee engagement by organizations and scholars, there are areas in the employee engagement literature lacking coverage. There is a lack of consensus among scholars on the best method to manage employee engagement; however, in the multidimensional approach, Saks (2006) combined the best qualities of

several different constructs. Practitioners should use the best qualities of various ideas about employee engagement connect and explore the success of various ideas over time.

Leaders must analyze how individual employee engagement levels influence the aggregate engagement level of an organization. Engagement of an individual employee, engagement of a group, organization, or other element may arise from employers using nontraditional factors (Costa, Passos, & Bakker, 2014). Collective levels of employee engagement are linked to individual levels of employee engagement (Griffin, 2015). However, there have been almost no attempts to formulate a construct describing collective engagement (Costa et al., 2014). Employers using group engagement activities will see a correlation between effects on organizational engagement and job engagement.

A career-oriented employee's perception of engagement strategy is a consideration for an organization. Alias, Noor, and Hassan (2014) stated that talent management practices and employee retention constructs, as they relate to employee engagement, are a neglected area of study and present a gap in the literature. Khan and Altaf (2015) found that decision-making abilities, reward systems, and training and development had the largest correlation to employee engagement among HR practices. Additionally, Kundu and Lata (2017) addressed the gap between employee engagement and retention and found a positive correlation between retention and organizational engagement. Employees with little or no prospects for career improvement will not be able to engage effectively to their job, which may negatively affect their coworkers.

Benefits of Employee Engagement

Engaged employees generate many benefits for an organization. Organizations need to focus on employee engagement strategies to increase their performance (Saxena & Srivastava, 2015). In addition, Anitha (2014) stated that an organization should use an employee engagement strategy to gain a positive environment for employees and employers. Increased employee engagement leads to better productivity, which leads to an opportunity for a positive economic impact (Anitha, 2014). Conversely, poor workforce engagement could lead to negative organizational outcomes stemming from decreased productivity and poor employee well-being (Shuck & Reio, 2014). There is a correlation between employee engagement and employee performance and attitude (Shuck & Reio, 2014). Additionally, there is a positive correlation between an employee's resilience and employee engagement (Kašpárková, Vaculík, Procházka, & Schaufeli, 2018). Organizations may see additional positive effects of employee engagement strategy implementation, and understanding these strategies can lead to new methods for engaging employees.

Organizations can leverage their positive social initiatives to influence employees in order to aid employee engagement strategy. Ali, Hussain, and Azim (2014) found a significant correlation between organizations' investment in social capital and employee job performance. Additionally, Ali et al. found a correlation between social capital and employee engagement. Stromgren, Eriksson, Bergman, and Dellve (2016) confirmed that social capital and employee engagement are linked to each other. Social capital may be

overlooked as a predictor of employee engagement, but failure to connect these ideas will result in an incomplete employee engagement strategy implementation.

Companies may strive to increase employee effectiveness through employee engagement. Companies with highly engaged employees benefit from improved efficiency (Shamsi & Saxena., 2014). Employees reach their full potential and job satisfaction mainly through employee engagement (Saxena & Srivastava, 2015). Additionally, interpersonal relationships may play a role in engaging employees (Costa et al., 2014). Conversely, employees who fail to voice concern or approval on work-related issues may be depriving an organization of useful information to learn from past operational experiences (Morrison, 2014). To achieve healthy investment returns, a good leader connects employee engagement to increasing revenues in their strategy considerations.

Lowering turnover intent. Organizations with high turnover costs seek ways to reduce turnover. Employees who leave the organization negatively affect coworkers who do not leave. Loyal employees with low attrition rates and with higher performance and productivity have high employee engagement levels (Saxena & Srivastava, 2015)—a consideration when weighing the cost of any engagement initiative. Shimazu, Schaufeli, Kamiyama, and Kawakami (2015) found work engagement to be correlated with increases in life satisfaction and job performance, as well as a decrease in ill health. There is a connection between employee well-being and employee engagement.

Reduced deviant behavior. Employees who develop negative feelings about work can result in negative behavior toward an organization. Samnani et al. (2014) found

counterproductive workplace behaviors to be harmful to the organization and employees; these behaviors may include physical or verbal aggression. Samnani et al. found a connection between moral disengagement and counterproductive workplace behaviors, with higher occurrences among males than females, despite similar levels of moral disengagement. There are many positive side effects of employee engagement that may contribute to lower moral disengagement and a reduction of counterproductive workplace behaviors.

Demographic Effects on Engagement

Leaders tailor employee engagement strategies to different generations of employees. Individual needs, desires, and motivations of employees will affect engagement levels in different ways (Jones et al., 2015). Barron, Leask, and Fyall (2014) found employee engagement activities to be different among generations. However, the majority of employee engagement strategies should be similar, with minor tailoring of strategic initiatives to each generation (Barron et al., 2014). Rigg et al. (2014) found that employers should expect older employees to have higher rates of employee engagement than their younger counterparts. In addition, Duxbury and Halinski (2014) found that employers trying to retain employees from the baby boomer generation will have to analyze workload concerns. To increase the engagement of baby boomer employees, employers need to root out unsupportive management and poor organizational culture (Duxbury & Halinski, 2014). Although older employees are more likely to be engaged at work, that does discount the need for engaging older generations. HR personnel,

managers, and engagement strategy formulators should target actions for older generations separate from actions targeted at younger generations.

Demographics play a role in employee engagement strategy. Employers should understand the distinctions between generations with selection and implementation of a strategy. Rigg et al. (2014) found that some demographics may affect engagement levels, and Maslach and Jackson (1981) confirmed this demographic link to engagement: singles are more prone to emotional exhaustion over those with a partner at home to support them. The demographics of a workforce may not represent the population as whole; therefore, various demographic groups require a targeted employee engagement strategy.

Engagement Propensity

Scholars have studied the propensity for employee engagement. Guest (2014) defined engagement propensity as the likelihood of a particular person to become engaged. Akhtar, Boustani, Tsivrikos, and Chamorro-Premuzic (2015) stated that personality factors are predictors of work engagement. Leaders who select individuals with a high engagement propensity will have a pool of employees who more likely to engage in their future roles.

Self-efficacy is an aspect of employee engagement strategy. Carter et al. (2016) found a positive correlation between employee engagement and self-efficacy (feeling confident in a job) and employee engagement. Therefore, leaders can use occupational self-efficacy as an effective tool to distinguish the difference between engaged and disengaged employees. Alternatively, employees are more likely to engage at work if they are involved in programs that improve occupational self-efficacy.

Caesens and Stinglhamber (2014) found that despite self-efficacy mediating employee engagement, perceived occupational support had the most substantial direct effect on work engagement. Employees with some degree of autonomy may lead to increased employee self-efficacy, which correlates with employee engagement. Emotional issues, as referred to in Saks (2006), can be measured in many ways, one of which is self-efficacy. Dagher et al. (2015) confirmed that belief in a person's own capabilities is an effective driver of employee engagement. Management should consider building the self-efficacy of their employees as a part of their engagement strategy.

Measuring Employee Engagement

There are two primary methods to measure employee engagement in the literature. The first is the Schaufeli and Bakker's (2003) Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). The second method of measurement is Soane et al.'s (2012) Intellectual, Social, Affective (ISA) Engagement Scale. These two methods have been developed in conjunction with an accompanying model and may not be a good choice for measurement when a different framework is being used. Many of the means developed to measure employee engagement may have only one construct in mind. The creation of different ways to measure engagement have left confusion about how to best measure employee engagement levels (Saks & Gruman, 2014; Smith & Bititci, 2017). There is also disagreement about the definition of employee engagement, which confuses some organization leaders interested in implementing a coherent employee engagement strategy.

UWES Scale. Researchers may have difficulty measuring the impact of employee engagement strategies because many factors outside of the control of the researcher may interfere. Many employee engagement studies use the UWES-9, or a close modification, described by Schaufeli and Bakker's Utrecht Work Engagement Scale Manual (2003). It is best to use this scale to measure the health of various components separately and address larger or pervasive employee engagement issues first. The overcompensation of one measured area may lead to future issues in complete employee engagement strategy. It is possible that smaller and potentially overlooked areas of the UWES Engagement Scale may contribute to employee engagement problems that manifest at a later time if not addressed.

Intellectual, Social, Affective Engagement Scale. Some measurements of employee engagement success may require a narrower focus on a model or desired outcome. Soane et al. (2012) built a model for measuring employee engagement: The ISA Engagement Scale. The purpose of the scale was to develop and define the components of employee engagement and implement and then measure them (Soane et al., 2012). The ISA engagement scale linked positive associations with task performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and turnover intentions (Soane et al., 2012). Further, Soane et al. found that social engagement is a significant forecaster of employee turnover intentions. The measurement tool for an organization can be useful when mixing and matching employee engagement models.

Employee Engagement and Leadership

Leadership style may be the most important factor in employee engagement measures. Effective leadership has been found to be correlated with high levels of employee engagement (Anitha, 2014). Leadership styles affect the actions and behaviors of employees in a given environment, and Khuong and Yen (2014) found that higher levels of employee sociability, ethical leadership, and visionary leadership correlated with greater rates of employee engagement. Khuong and Yen suggested limiting transactional leadership styles and focusing more on visionary leadership and ethical leadership styles. Anitha (2014) found that employee engagement levels are directly related to the work environment promoted by an organization and that leaders and managers directly reflect an organization's culture. Leadership styles have varying effects on employee engagement, and organizations must select a style that works best for their circumstances.

A leadership style can be measured for effectiveness against employee engagement levels. Breevaart, Bakker, Hetland, and et al. (2014) examined the impacts of transformational leadership on the engagement of military cadets in their work and found that the cadets were more engaged on days when the leader made efforts to express transformational leadership traits. Breevaart, Bakker, Demerouti, and van den Heuvel (2015) found that quality leader-member exchange increased work engagement and organizational outcomes. Despite limitations, a leader should strive for positive effects through interactions with as many employees as possible.

Employers should develop employee communication. Permana et al. (2015) proposed that empowering employees aids in creating an environment that fosters employee engagement. Engaged employees are encouraged to voice their ideas, concerns, and suggestions to an organization (Albrecht et al., 2015). When leaders empower their subordinates, an organization can benefit from the resulting free flow of ideas. Lower-level employees may be more familiar with aspects of day-to-day work, and without effective communication, leaders are unable to gauge the effectiveness of certain tasks.

The channels of communication between leaders and their subordinates directly affect employee engagement. Owens et al. (2015) stated that leader–follower interactions are associated with job engagement and performance. Communication should not flow in only one direction. Employees who can communicate their concerns openly to their leaders may become more engaged. Employees need performance feedback in order to remain highly engaged. Without feedback, whether positive or negative, employees will not be able to gauge their own perceived degree of success. Leaders and supervisors must provide this feedback in regular intervals and ensure that spot corrections or praise maintains perceived fairness.

Human Resource Development

HR personnel have a role in facilitating and executing employee engagement strategies. Organizations should focus on employee engagement to enhance employee outcomes (Anitha, 2014). HR management practitioners are responsible for evolving employee engagement strategies into policies and practices, socialization, performance

management, and training and development (Albrecht et al., 2015). HR management

personnel are at the forefront of effective employee engagement strategies.

HR departments must address the concept of fairness in the workplace. He, Zhu,

and Zheng (2014) confirmed that procedural justice enhances employee engagement and

that strong moral identity in an employee correlates with higher employee engagement.

He et al. discovered that procedural justice may counter the effect of moral identity on

employee engagement, which means an employer may inspire employees of poor moral

character by setting a good example. Being treated fairly by an employer may inspire

fellow employees to follow in that example in their interactions with other employees and

with the organization.

Engagement facilitation is not just a function of HR. However, HR departments,

because of their nature, play a role in facilitating employee engagement through policy

and action. HR professionals should avoid an "us versus them" environment with

employees as being counterproductive. Rana (2015) stated that high-involvement work

practices can be a tool to develop employee engagement strategy. Such practices derive

from giving employees power, information, rewards, and knowledge (Rana, 2015) and

are a function shared between HR, leadership personnel, and strategy makers. HR staff

should develop knowledgeable and effective employees.

Employers, through their HR department, need to develop appropriate

expectations for their employees. Organizations need employees who are committed,

capable, and independent (Permana et al., 2015). However, balance between work and

life are important, and appropriate level of work should be tied to a particular

compensation. Bakker et al. (2014) cautioned that overworking employees leads to negative health outcomes. Staffing levels and workload size play a role in employee engagement strategy effectiveness. HR departments should assign reasonably attainable goals and job descriptions. Employees should be paid appropriately to attract talent.

HR practices should support organizational commitment strategies. Albrecht et al. (2015) stated that HR practices, directly and indirectly, affect areas of an organization, including employee engagement. Organizational commitment reflects an employee's obligation to remain with an organization (Geldenhuys et al., 2014). HR departments should leverage organizational commitment with engagement to build higher engagement rates. Once employees feel committed and connected to an organization, there is a lower chance of their leaving the organization.

An HR department's proactive employee engagement strategies in the hiring process will benefit individuals and their organizations. Saks and Gruman (2018) stated leaders should place more emphasis on engaging new employees of an organization. Cooper-Thomas et al. (2014) found that newcomers' proactive behaviors (taking initiative) yielded positive outcomes for a company through faster socialization into the company. Bal and De Lange (2015) discussed HR management practices that aid employees in combining work and nonwork responsibilities. Employers should strive to hire employees prone to proactive workplace behaviors to complement employee engagement strategies.

HR departments need to adapt flexible work polices that are beneficial to employees (flex schedules, leave policies, teleworking, and etc.). Bal and de Lange

hypothesized that the use of flexibility HR management practices (practices that aid employees with the task of combining work and nonwork responsibilities) would increase employee engagement. Bal and De Lange found that HR management practices did not affect employee engagement; however, the availability of such programs did increase engagement. Strategic engagement policies in HR management lead to a competitive advantage (Albrecht et al., 2015). Flexibility HR management availability increased employees' perceptions of the helpfulness of the organization; even if employees choose not to use a certain benefit, the fact that it exists makes a difference to them.

The implementation of employee engagement strategies extends beyond leaders and managers to the HR department. Valentin, Valentin, and Nafukho (2015) stated that employee engagement is a large consideration of HR personnel. Maximizing potential talent should be a focus (Turner & Kalman, 2015), with employee engagement strategy an effective tool. Proper training for hiring managers and leaders will ensure that they can effectively execute employee engagement strategies and programs.

Employees are investments of an organization; therefore, HR departments should build an employee engagement strategy around developing their employees. Alias et al. (2014) found that when employees are groomed with talent management practices, they are better engaged with the job and organization. Employees looking for help with goal orientation or finding meaning at work should look to their HR department (Jones et al., 2015). Open communication with employees about their career goals and advice on reaching those goals will also strengthen the role of HR departments.

Strategies for Implementation

Employee engagement strategies involve investments in human capital and environmental settings. Chung and Yazdanifard (2014) stated that employees who cannot connect with corporate culture will not reach their full potential for an organization. Taneja et al. (2015) stated that managing employee engagement will have an impact on local and global levels. With new insight on employee engagement, employers will now see large scale second and third order effects.

The saying that, "what is good for one, is not necessarily good for all" applies to attempts at engaging different groups of employees in the same organization. Shirin and Kleyn (2017) found that employees' perceptions of an organization reputation were an important factor for employee engagement. Organizations need to invest strategically to increase employee engagement, and leaders need to link strategy with talent management to reach better levels of employee engagement (Taneja et al., 2015). Leaders and managers, from the top down in an organization, need to share and use best practices for deploying employee engagement strategies. Medlin and Green (2014) stated that identifying management practices for employee engagement is essential to building strategy for improving engagement rates. Organizations should find ways to disseminate best practices and/or lessons learned from leaders who have found success in effecting change.

Individual employees are affected from the organization's engagement initiatives. Barrick, Thurgood, Smith, and Courtright (2015) established a comprehensive theory to explain the idea of collective organizational engagement. Engagement can be thought of

in the same way as trickle-down economics: Engagement of the collective will result in higher levels of individual engagement. Barrick et al. proposed that investing in entry-level work design, HR management, and transformational leadership was associated with higher levels of employee engagement, which can amplify collective engagement levels when employees are engaged across an organization. Leveraging the collective organization to engage employees as a group should be an employee engagement strategy consideration.

Organizations have an obligation to social responsibility, which correlates with employee engagement. Social responsibility initiatives will not resonate with every employee; leaders must continually evaluate how different initiatives resonate with employees (Schrempf-Stirling, Palazzo, & Phillips, 2016). For social responsibility initiatives to work, there must be effective communication about projects to the employees (Duthler & Dhanesh, 2018). Social responsibility initiatives may create new ways for employees to feel linked to an organization (Valentin et al., 2015). Leaders and managers need to consider that employees are aware of the organizational decision-making process, and those decisions may have negative or positive consequences that impact their community, region, or country.

Sometimes barriers to employee engagement are intangible. Rayton and Yalabik (2014) examined the link between psychological contract breach and work engagement and found that work engagement levels are likely to be higher when employees perceive that their organization lives up to its promises and obligations. Ugwu, Onyishi, and Rodriquez-Sanchez (2014) found that trust in the organization and psychological

empowerment are predictors of employee engagement. Hsieh and Wang (2015) found that employee trust levels correlate to perceived authentic leadership and work engagement. Organizations must follow through on promises they make to build trust, while implementing strategies to increase employee engagement.

Transition

In Section 1, I presented a background and review of the current employee engagement field and its various challenges facing scholars and practitioners. Also, I identified general and specific business problem statements and the purpose of conducting this study. In addition, Section 1 contained the qualitative research methodology and the conceptual framework that will guide the research and the assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and significance of the study. Section 1 contains a conclusion with a review of the professional and academic literature that supports this study and its theme of employee engagement.

Numerous themes through the review of academic and professional literature are evident. Employee engagement literature is diverse, as employee engagement models are from several different academic fields. Benefits from employee engagement initiatives have the potential to increase efficiency and competitiveness but measuring employee engagement is difficult because there is disagreement among scholars on an exact definition. However, specific critical areas of focus on employee engagement strategy are prominent: demographics, engagement propensity, leadership styles, and human resource considerations.

In Section 2, I will restate the purpose statement for this qualitative case study, Additionally, I will discuss the role of the researcher, I will elaborate on the participant access strategy, and I will examine ethical considerations. Also, I will identify the data collection strategies for the research methodology, the data analysis, and the reliability and validity of the instruments proposed for this qualitative case study.

In Section 3, I will summarize the data, the analysis, and the findings from the data for this study. Additionally, I will present how the findings are pertinent to professional practice and social change. In closing, I will prepare recommendations for future research and deliver closing comments.

Section 2: The Project

Section 2 will contain a description of the research project plan, including the study method, population sampling, data collection techniques, and data analysis. In Section 2, I will provide a synopsis of the actions I took to enhance the reliability and validity of the study. Finally, Section 2 will include an analysis of the tools I used for collecting the data.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, single case study was to explore strategies that organizational leaders used to improve employee engagement. The population was comprised of leaders in an office design corporation in the midwestern United States who have implemented effective employee engagement strategies. The outcomes of this study could contribute to positive social change by linking employee engagement strategies to employees' work-life balance and general happiness. Failure to enjoy a job could have a significant impact on the overall enjoyment people have in their lives. Increased understanding of how employee engagement affects an organization can increase productivity, foster a healthier work environment, and positively impact the well-being of employees.

Role of the Researcher

Researchers must define their role and disclose guidelines for their participation. According to Yin (2014), a qualitative researcher collects data. However, a researcher's skill in data collection will affect the validity and reliability of the study (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). I used a single case study design to interact and collaborate

with supervisors, managers, and other company leaders through semistructured, face-to-face interviews. Further, I reviewed organizational documents that pertained to employee engagement.

As the researcher, I obtained approval from all of the participants and communicated with them for the duration of the study, following receiving Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. To ensure that I complied with the IRB and remained consistent, I followed an interview protocol (see Appendix). After completing the data collection process and subsequent member checking protocols, I used hand coding to develop themes to answer the research question. Subsequently, I assigned meaning to the data and summarized the emerging themes. Next, I reviewed my interpretations with the research participants and clarified ambiguities. Lastly, I provided the participants a formal report detailing the data and notifying them that they will receive a white paper containing my summarized case study findings.

Having been an employee of different public and private organizations in the midwestern United States, I have been exposed to regional norms related to employee engagement strategies. Additionally, I was concerned with employment engagement strategies when I was a supervisor to others in my previous employment experience. Miles et al. (2014) stated that a researcher evaluates participants and puts their experience in proper context. Having relevant experience relating to the topic might have helped me put perspectives in the proper context. Knowing my own experience, I employed bracketing techniques to ensure that I did not let my own bias interfere with the point of view of any of the participants and prevented bias from corrupting my study.

Bias affects all researchers. Researchers remove bias from data through their reflection and comprehension of their personal connection to a study (Miles et al., 2014). To better evaluate and interpret the opinions of others, researchers must outline what personal views they have that might influence the subject (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I employed a bracketing strategy to acknowledge and reduce my personal bias in this study. Researchers can use a reflexive diary (i.e., a bracketing technique) to identify bias by recording his or her thoughts and feelings during the research process (Darawsheh, 2014). I bracketed my personal bias in a reflexive journal to ensure that I was aware of any potential bias in the data collection phase.

Ethical considerations are vital to research with human subjects. Receiving the approval of an IRB ensures the rights of human subjects in research (Stang, 2015). The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research's *Belmont Report* (1979) contains the principles a researcher should adopt to achieve ethical standards: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. I applied these principles to my research. Additionally, I adopted the protocols that are detailed in the *Belmont Report* by obtaining informed consent, assessing risks and benefits, and selecting appropriate participants for the study to guarantee that research conducted on human subjects was ethically sound. Participants must understand the purpose of the research if a researcher wants to protect their rights (Yin, 2014). Researchers should follow strict ethical protocols to ensure they eliminate possible ethical concerns from their study.

Participants

The participants of the study were five organizational leaders of a design company with a national presence who had used strategies to engage employees. I selected participants from offices in the Midwest through a purposive sample from the company's home office. A researcher may use purposive sampling to ensure the qualifications of participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Miles et al., 2014; Yin, 2014). I gained direct access to the interview participants and the research data by contacting a high-level executive in the company who had shown interest in employee engagement research. This executive gave me permission to contact local executives from the company's main offices about participation in this study. Additionally, I procured a letter of cooperation from the company to allow company resources for interview space, employees to be interviewed during their shift, and the use of the company network to communicate with the participants.

After receiving approval from the Walden University IRB, I immediately began the research process. To gain access to the participants, I e-mailed and used first-class mail to deliver a letter of information describing the study to the CEO of the company, and he disseminated the invitation to five potential participants he knew fit the participant profile in the main office of the company. I then used e-mail and first-class mail to deliver a letter of consent to potential participants outlining the purpose of the study, the requirement for being at least 18 years of age, and a formal request for voluntary participation before collecting data for the study. Further, I responded to any questions or

concerns the potential participants had to provide a full understanding of the intent and process of my research.

I chose this corporation for my study site for several reasons. First, at the study site, there was evidence of employee engagement initiatives discussed on their website and voiced by their CEO. Second, a researcher may build on the exploration of these employee engagement strategies in future research to measure their effectiveness. Last, a company that implements employee engagement strategies effectively encouraged a wider pool of participants to agree to work with me because of their familiarity with the topic.

Researchers must follow established guidelines and procedures to be effective. For case study protocols to be met, participants and researchers need to establish a proper working relationship (Yin, 2014). As a person with general employment experience as a supervisor, I fulfilled the role of an insider and an outsider to explore the strategies leaders used to engage employees. Through an effective relationship with a proper amount of professional distance, a researcher may reduce reflexivity from participants (Yin, 2014). As a person interested in employee engagement strategy, I understood the importance of employees enjoying their day at work and how an organizations' leaders affect employee engagement level. Onwuegbuzie and Byers (2014) stated that relating to participants in an authentic way may allow a researcher to assess a participant's responses more accurately. My personal experience with the topic was a benefit to the study.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

In this study, I used a qualitative, single case study design. I chose to pursue the qualitative method for this study for several reasons. Researchers use qualitative designs to gain flexibility through semistructured interviews that provide deep inquiry into the past and present (Thurman, 2017). Additionally, a qualitative researcher explores a phenomenon through his or her understanding of a participant's perceptions (McKim, 2017). Miles et al. (2014) stated that qualitative research has several options available to explore a phenomenon. A researcher uses the flexibility of the qualitative approach to explore participants' personal insights, which made it the best choice for my study.

I did not intend to test an objective hypothesis or theory, but rather to explore the strategies that leaders used to engage employees. Trafimow (2014) stated that quantitative research is routinely statistical. Quantitative scholars rely on numerical data to prove or disprove a hypothesis (McNabb, 2015). Quantitative studies are meant to provide objective and concise measurement (Bernard, 2012). A researcher must grasp the context of a participant's response to analyze strategies for engaging employees. I chose the qualitative approach over the quantitative approach for this study because I could not explore strategies through unique participant responses with a quantitative inquiry.

Mixed methods is another possible methodology that researchers can employ. Mixed-method research includes both aspects of qualitative and quantitative forms of inquiry (Bernard, 2012). The purpose of this qualitative, single case study was to explore the strategies that some organizational leaders used to improve employee engagement;

the lack of a hypothesis reinforced the futility of a using the quantitative approach to research this topic. In my study, a mixed-methods approach was not the most appropriate way to explore the strategies that some organizational leaders used to improve employee engagement. The qualitative methodology was the most suitable choice to explore this phenomenon through the participants' own experiences.

Research Design

I used a single case study design for this study. According to Yin (2014), a case study approach originates from the study design, method, or phenomenon; this takes place within a precise and bounded system (Stake, 1995). Yin also stated that the case study is a legitimate way to study organizational issues. Through triangulation, case studies are a good tool to bring together information from multiple sources (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this study, I explored the strategies that leaders used to engage their employees, something many other case studies researchers address in various ways. The benefits of using a case study (i.e., flexibility, study evolution, and triangulation) made it the most appropriate design to select.

I selected a case study design because it was the most appropriate design to answer the research question. According to Yin (2014), there are three possible case study designs: exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory. I used an exploratory design to explore the strategies that leaders used to engage their employees. Neither a descriptive nor explanatory design would have allowed me the freedom to explore the employee engagement strategies in use. For the purposes of this study, a descriptive case study did not fit, because describing a particular setting or process did not show the extent of

employee engagement strategy implementation or its efficacy. I did not believe the topic was mature enough for explanatory research, making an exploratory design a better choice. In this study, I explored how employee engagement strategy was related to organizational and job engagement and how the participants interpreted the experience.

For this study, I also considered other potential research designs. Researchers use phenomenology to explore human experiences in detail to understand a phenomenon (Bevan, 2014; Malagon-Maldonado, 2014). Further, researchers use a phenomenological design to learn how individuals assign meaning to an event through bracketing (Malagon-Maldonado, 2014; Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). Exploring human experience was not applicable to this study because an employee engagement strategy cannot be explored though a human experience; therefore, I chose not to use a phenomenology design.

Grounded theory is another qualitative design. Researchers use grounded theory to generate or modify a theory (Grossoehme, 2014; Malagon-Maldonado, 2014). A researcher can also use grounded theory to identify and code categories and concepts to create a theory (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). I explored strategies used by leaders to engage their employees and did not attempt to generate or modify any theory.

I also considered ethnography for this study. Researchers use ethnography to explore customs, beliefs, behaviors, or other social traditions (Malagon-Maldonado, 2014). Scholars also use ethnography to investigate phenomena from an anthropological point of view (Grossoehme, 2014). In an ethnography, a researcher creates descriptions and observations of the participants (Malagon-Maldonado, 2014). Exploring customs, beliefs, behaviors, or social traditions would not have aided in the exploration of

leadership strategies for employee engagement; therefore, I did not choose an ethnography design for this study.

It is imperative that a researcher obtain enough data to answer his or her research question. A case study must incorporate multiple data sources to answer the research question (Yin, 2014). Additionally, data saturation from each source should be achieved. Through member checking of semistructured interviews, I verified the accuracy of a participant's responses and ensured that I achieved data saturation.

Population and Sampling

The study's population of leaders came from a company with a value exceeding $100 million. A researcher may use purposive sampling to ensure the qualifications of participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Miles et al., 2014). Additionally, the sample size depends on the quality of the interviews (Miles et al., 2014). For this study, a purposive sample was sufficient to represent the population. The sample for this study consisted of five leaders in an office design corporation in the midwestern United States who had implemented effective employee engagement strategies. Qualitative research usually has a small sample that is studied in depth (Miles et al., 2014). Each participant directly supervised employees or was involved in management policies related to employee engagement. Also, each participant had a minimum of 2 years with the organization to ensure a well-rounded view of the population and the ability to gauge the success of employee engagement policies. To verify the eligibility of participants, I confirmed their position descriptions and previous 2 years of employment with the company's CEO to verify their involvement with employee engagement strategies. I also

ensured that I had a sufficient number of participants to establish accurate themes and promote data saturation.

I used semistructured interviews to promote the discovery of themes in the study. Additionally, I requested that interview participants provide any relevant internal documents to me at the time of the interview or soon thereafter. Yin (2014) stated that interviews are an essential source of evidence in a case study. Cridland, Jones, Caputi, and Magee (2015) stated that when planning interviews, researchers should focus on the time, travel, and pace that works best for the interviewee. The interviews took place in a distraction-free place within the organization and by phone due to scheduling conflicts that prohibited in-person meetings. Further, I conducted a content analysis of archival documents provided by participants during or following the interviews. Content analysis is a system of planning, collecting, analyzing, and presenting data (Bengtsson, 2016). I used content analysis to combine and synthesize the information from the interviews with organizational data.

Ethical Research

To ensure an ethical approach to the study, the high-level executive received a plain language explanation detailing the use of confidentiality and transparency to pass on to any potential participants prior to any contact. Researchers must consider all potential harmful actions that could result from their actions (Miles et al., 2014). Knepp (2014) found that a majority of participants in a test study failed to read the consent form before signing. Participation in the study required a signed informed consent form, which clarified the execution of the study. I provided each potential participant with a plain

language explanation detailing the use of confidentiality and transparency during and after the study, and I read it to him or her to outline the details of participation before the interviews. Participants had the option to withdraw their participation at any time during regular communication or through an ad-hoc request via e-mail or phone. I made it clear that participants who chose not to participate would have no negative repercussions. No incentives were given in return for participation.

The data generated during the course of the study will remain on an encrypted storage device that was placed in a bank safe deposit box for a period of 5 years. The data will then be destroyed in accordance with current data management best practices. Per the recommendation of Walshe et al. (2016), all stored data were locked, password protected, encrypted, and anonymized where possible. As an added layer of participant confidentiality, the participants received a unique identifier (number 1-5, assigned in order of interview) in a database, with the key to their identity stored separately in a secure location. To ensure the information derived from the data remains confidential, I used a catalog and coding system to prevent possible identification of participants. I obtained approval from the Walden University IRB and the participating organization before I began to confirm compliance with these ethical requirements. The IRB approval number for this study is 09-20-18-0423277.

Data Collection Instruments

As the researcher, I served as the primary data collection instrument for this study. I conducted semistructured interviews directly with participants. The interviews took place in person when possible and by phone, due to interfering scheduling conflicts.

Prior to the interviews, I obtained informed consent and answered any questions from each participant. Additionally, I informed the participants that the interview was to be recorded and interpreted. Last, I let the participants know I was interested in any organizational documents related to employee engagement and requested that they bring them to the interview or provide them soon after.

I used document review as an additional data source. Researchers use organizational documents related to their research question to strengthen data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yin, 2014). According to Medhurst and Albrecht (2016), other employee engagement researchers used organizational documents as data collection documents. At the conclusion of the interviews, I asked participants to provide any relevant documents that supported their answers or that supported relevant employee engagement information.

I conducted semistructured interviews and collected relevant documents from participants. Yin (2014) suggested following a protocol to reduce bias. I followed an interview protocol (Appendix) while conducting interviews to reduce personal bias. I then summarized my interpretation of the interview. The researcher uses document analysis and interviews to reveal themes and concepts in conjunction with the other data sources (Miles et al., 2014; Yin, 2014). I conducted member checking after participant interviews to enhance the accuracy of the interpretations of the participants' responses, as recommended by Morse (2015b). I reviewed, interpreted, and summarized each interview question. I then provided the summary to the participant to verify accuracy and collect new information if there were corrections. This increased the reliability and validity of

the study, I used ample participants, reviewed all relevant documentation, and worked toward methodological triangulation.

Data Collection Technique

Semistructured interviews and document analysis of materials provided by each participant were the data collection methods for this study. The advantages of semistructured interviews were flexibility and the ability to have deep inquiry into the past and present (Thurman, 2017). Interviews also allow for the researcher to explore a phenomenon through a participant's perception (McKim, 2017).

Despite the advantages of a semistructured interview, a researcher should also consider any potential problems. Researchers experience a disadvantage of semistructured interviews through working around schedule conflicts with participants (Rahman, 2015). Researchers will also have to coordinate travel and location of the interview with participants (Cridland et al., 2015). The advantages of a semistructured interview outweigh the minor disadvantages. To ensure effective data collection, Yin (2014) suggested that researchers generate an interview protocol. I developed a protocol for collection of interview data (Appendix). Researchers should use an interview protocol to ensure uniformity and enhance the validity their research.

There are potential challenges with document collection and review. One advantage is that other employee engagement researchers use document collection and review in their own research (Medhurst & Albrecht, 2016). Participants who do not have knowledge (or memory) of a particular document's potential existence will not be able to produce it for review. I mitigated memory omissions by reminding participants before

and during the interview that related organizational documents were essential to support the research.

The initial contact with participants included a brief overview of the study, a request to participate, and a description of the interview procedure expectations. It is imperative to make clear to participants the details on the consent form, as Knepp (2014) demonstrated that most participants will not read them. After confirming participation with each participant, I set up an appointment with each participant and requested that he or she sign the consent form. The consent forms were returned before the start time of the scheduled interview. At that point, I reminded participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The interview preparation e-mail sent to the participants included the interview questions to in aid their responses.

I used an Apple iPad Air to record each interview for transcription through voice to text software. Additionally, I used an LG G6 as a backup recorder during the interviews. Correctly transcribing an interview is an essential part of data analysis (Cridland et al., 2015). Interviews began with an overview of the study, followed by the finalized interview questions for the participants. I noted any exploratory questions as they arose during an interview in a uniform manner. Upon conclusion of each interview, I used a voice-to-text software application to transcribe the interviews. I then reviewed interview transcriptions and relevant documents. Finally, to ensure the accuracy and validity of my findings, each participant received the transcribed interview along with my data interpretations for member checking purposes. Morse (2015b) defined member checking as the process of letting the participant review the researcher's interpretation of

the participant's interview responses to make corrections. Harvey (2015) stated that participant engagement via member checking allows a researcher to represent an accurate description of a participant's voice and experience. I catalogued the participants' information, responses, and the documentation reviewed, and I preserved key documents found during document analysis.

Data Organization Technique

After transcribing the interview data, I sorted the data into themes. I coded the data into useful information to address the research question. Additionally, I derived themes from company documents and compared common themes from the interview data. This was the most effective way to gauge the success of strategies currently and previously implemented by the organization's leaders.

I further prepared the data for analysis with a reflexive journal. Researchers use reflexive journals to record their initial understandings during the data collection phase (Darawsheh, 2014; Taylor & Thomas-Gregory, 2015). Researchers also use reflexive journals to establish an audit trail that reinforces the validity of a study (Taylor & Thomas-Gregory, 2015). I used a reflexive journal to record time, date, location, and my perceptions as I encountered data through interviews and document review.

I took notes during the data collection phase and stored them for easy retrieval. Flick (2015) recommended that researchers take notes during their collection phase and store them for easy retrieval. I employed hand coding for data organization and retrieval purposes. The database I created for the case study was of sufficient scope, as it provided room for each category and its respective components. Including a set of categories that

mirrored the ideas of Saks allowed me to capture rich findings of employee engagement strategies in the selected organization. I designed the categories to prioritize any employee engagement strategies identified and listed the more effective components in order of priority. All of the collected data and generated information will remain secured in a safe deposit box, and any digital paper trails will be stored on encrypted flash drives. After a period of 5 years, research data will be permanently destroyed. Additionally, my reflexive journal will be kept in the safe deposit box and subsequently destroyed with the other materials.

Data Analysis

I used thematic analysis to support methodological triangulation for this qualitative study. Researchers can best interpret data by organizing it into themes (Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, & Redwood, 2013). Additionally, researchers can use methodological triangulation to validate a study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Patton, 2015). Through the organization of the data into themes, I was able to align the data sources. This is done by verifying results from multiple data sources (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Additionally, researchers should be able to identify patterns across more than one data collection method (Cronin, 2014). I used methodological triangulation to analyze data to confirm recurring patterns from each of my data sources.

Case studies, by their nature, give a researcher a great deal of freedom for analyzing data. However, case study analysis benefits from a generic analytic strategy though an element of uniformity across swaths of case studies (Yin, 2014). I followed the analysis process developed by Yin (2014)—a basic five-step analysis process designed

for qualitative methods: (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting, and (e) concluding. First, this consisted of compiling all of my data into a single location (in Microsoft Word). Next, I disassembled data for each participant and source of information by highlighting recurring and similar phrases. After highlighting these recurring phrases, I assigned them a specific coding theme. I then reassembled the data into themes, through hand coding. Finally, I drew out conclusions that were presented in the themes. Finally, I drew out conclusions that were presented in the themes. The conclusions found through this process may aid leaders and organizations to develop and implement effective employee engagement strategies.

Data analysis will lead to the identification of themes, with the ultimate goal of answering the research question of this study. Onwuegbuzie and Byers (2014) detailed the extensive process of data analysis many researchers use in qualitative research. Yin (2014) also stated that data analysis should identify themes, patterns, and descriptions to answer the research question. These data will then become useful information, as they are applied to categories in the literature review that help further define employee engagement and strategies that support it.

The framework for this study was the multifaceted employee engagement model developed by Saks (2006). Borrego, Foster, and Froyd (2014) stated that the framework is what connects the method of a study, the available literature, and the findings of that study. I analyzed the data through the lens created by Saks's employee engagement model to ascertain the effectiveness of the leader and or organizational strategies. This also allowed for comparing my study, based on Saks's model, to other major themes and

competing theories. Ideally, themes from the literature will add to the validity of the data through concurrence with my findings.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Researchers should also consider reliability factors. Miles et al. (2014) defined reliability as the measure of replication of the findings of a study. Yin (2014) defined reliability in case study research as the ability of other researchers to follow set procedures and end with similar results. Additionally, researchers use reliability and validity processes make data more accurate and dependable through member checking, bracketing and triangulation (Morse, 2015b.) I interacted with all participants in the same manner from start to finish to ensure their interview experiences were as similar as possible.

Researchers must also consider dependability. A researcher builds dependability by providing enough information and justification for methodological design decisions to enable other researchers to reach the same results with the same data (Cope, 2014). Additionally, I included member checking of my interpretations with interview participants after I summarized their interview responses. Further, I detailed and supported my research design choices. Additionally, I combined the findings of the document review with interview data for methodological triangulation. By increasing the reliability and dependability of the study, other researchers can replicate the findings of a study.

Validity

Researchers use case study validity to build the credibility of a study. To increase validity in a case study, Yin (2014) recommended using multiple sources of supporting evidence. Further, validity refers to the accuracy of the data and its interpretation in a qualitative study (Miles et al., 2014; Pandey & Chawla, 2016). To increase the validity of this study, I collected data from multiple sources through interviews and internal company documents. Qualitative researchers must also differentiate between internal and external validity (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). Increases in validity lead to an increase the study's credibility. In a qualitative study, validity and data saturation are not linked to sample size (Fusch & Ness, 2015), and data transferability enhances external validity (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Miles et al., 2014). Researchers use validity methods to achieve other positive outcomes.

Another consideration for study validity is transferability. Transferability is a measure of how well study findings may apply to other research (Crowe, Inder, & Porter, 2015). According to Yin (2014), transferability also leads to stronger external validity. Through proper documentation, execution, and appropriate level of detail, other researchers can replicate or build on the study.

Another consideration for increasing the validity of a study is confirmability. Confirmability is the demonstration of the plausibility or sturdiness of data or its interpretations while presenting a lack of bias (Miles et al., 2014). An interview protocol will help an interviewer prevent bias (Yin, 2014). I used an interview protocol to remove

bias, and I used software to help me draw themes from the semistructured interviews, which aided in objectivity.

There are several other elements that have a role in the validity of the study, and the first consideration should be data saturation. Data saturation occurs when no new information appears (Miles et al., 2014). Morse (2015a) stated that data saturation leads to a fuller presentation of the data through overlapping and aggregation. Additionally, Fusch and Ness (2015) stated that a researcher could use a grid to track the progression of data saturation. The target sample size was enough to achieve data saturation, and I did gather enough documents to review for triangulation of data.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I detailed the research plan. First, there was a restatement of the purpose of this research study. Next, I defined the parameters of the researcher's role and importance. Additionally, I detailed the balance between the researcher's role in relation to ethical and bias concerns. Subsequently, I detailed the ideal participants of the study and how I gained access to them. I detailed proper selection of a research method, design, and the study population to ensure others understand why I made choices for this study. Also, in Section 2, I recapped the main points of achieving an ethical approach to the study and how I protected the research participants' identity and confidentiality of information. Further, I described how I collected, organized, and interpreted the data for the case study. Finally, I addressed reliability and validity concerns for the study.

In Section 3, I will summarize the data, the analysis, and the findings from the data for this study. Additionally, I will present how the findings are pertinent to

professional practice and social change. In closing, I will provide recommendations for

future research and deliver closing comments.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, single case study was to explore strategies that organizational leaders used to improve employee engagement. In this section, I will present the findings of my interviews with five leaders responsible for creating or implementing employee engagement strategies. In my interviews with these leaders and through my review of company documents provided by the study participants, I found that the organization placed a significant amount of time and attention toward refining their employee engagement levels. Leaders included the following themes in their strategies to engage employees: (a) communication, (b) employee involvement, (c) employee development, (d) top-down approaches to strategy with an emphasis on manager buy-in, (e) flexibility for employees with their time, (f) tailored strategies across demographic groups, and (g) environments conducive to employee engagement.

Presentation of the Findings

In presenting the findings of this study, I will discuss all of the themes that emerged from my semistructured interviews with five organizational leaders and my review of company documents provided by the participants. The overarching research question for this study was the following: What strategies do organizational leaders use to improve employee engagement?

Theme 1: Communication

The first theme that I identified as used by organizational leaders in employee engagement strategy was communication. Each study participant confirmed that company

efforts towards communication were extensive. Participant 2 stated, "Our primary strategy is to gather, to gather feedback from our employees in general." Participant 4 expressed, "So, I think that there's several things kind of relating to this, but I think the biggest one would just be communication." Further, Participant 3 added, "Constant communication, constant monitoring of performance, having an open-door policy." Participant 3 claimed that communication was a two-way exchange, stating, "Number one for me on everything is to listen," then adding, "If they feel like leadership and management really understands the challenges in their job, I think they tend to be more engaged." Participant 4 stated, "One item that we have recently implemented here is a video board in our common area (for a continuous stream of information to employees at the office)." Participants agreed that communication is the cornerstone of the organization's employee engagement strategies.

The organization's archival documents also supported this theme. A third-party vendor that specializes in employee engagement and opinion surveys conducted a survey for the organization in early 2018 (as well as prior years). According to the survey company, the purpose of the survey was "To identify important employee issues that may need to be addressed, as well as areas of strength to leverage." Over 170 employees participated in the 2018 survey, representing more than three quarters of the company. The survey company found that 56% of the company was partially engaged and 44% of the company was fully engaged. Only one person was found to be actively disengaged, which was approximately 0.5% of participants. According to the survey company, the

organization scored higher than the national norms in all but one category across the full survey.

Scholars who have researched employee engagement and the mediating effect of communication confirmed the importance of communication when engaging employees. Internal communication effort correlates with higher levels of employee engagement (Kang & Sung, 2017). Saxena and Srivastava (2015) found that open communication was strongly correlated with employee engagement. Leaders can use employee engagement strategies to elicit full participation in organizational activities. Managers should leverage internal communication practices that invite employee participation in organizational activities (Kang & Sung, 2017). Managers should cultivate communication with their employees to increase employee engagement (Kang & Sung, 2017). Increased employee participation in organizational activities leads to higher employee engagement levels.

The use of communication indirectly aligned with Saks's (2006) multidimensional approach. Although communication was not listed as antecedent for job or organizational engagement, other qualities are listed that imply communication. Saks listed perceived organization support and perceived supervisor support as antecedents to employee engagement, and both items require communication. Engagement in an organization has a strong connection to two-way communication between an employee and an employer.

Theme 2: Employee Involvement

Employee involvement strategies aid employee engagement. The participants confirmed that involving employees in decision making and promoting awareness of how

the company departments work toward a common goal improved employee engagement.

Participant 2 stated,

> We get people involved in a lot of things that are going on around the company,
> the financials we share all of that. We share metrics, but we have also given those
> people a lot of time to provide feedback as well.

Participant 1 noted, "We try to get involvement from the employees, not just the leaders. In this case, we are looking to the employees and saying, give us a solution." Additionally, Participant 3 stated, "So, when they can be a part of the process, part of the decision making, part of the planning, part of the execution, that tends to make just about anybody a bit more engaged." The participants agreed that being a part of the decision-making process leads to more engaged employees.

Employees need to have a sense of purpose within an organization. Participant 2 stated, "Rather than relying on the five people at the top, we're looking at engaging other people to help get the message out." Participant 1 added, "I think giving employees, you know, the reason why they're coming to work every day and doing what they're doing to help get them to these end goals." Participant 3 stated, "I like to make sure employees understand the big picture of the company and how they fit in." Participants agreed that sharing details of the company with employees who are not directly involved with those activities helped employees understand their own importance to the company's mission.

The theme of employee involvement was not mentioned specifically in the company's archival documents. However, the employee opinion and engagement survey and communication boards provided an outlet for employee involvement indirectly. The

communication boards provided a window through which employees could learn more about other departments of the company.

Employee involvement is a topic that has been discussed within the extant employee engagement literature. Organizations must allow employees to have a voice in company decision making (Das, Byadwal, & Singh, 2017). Rana (2015) stated that high-involvement work practices lead to increased employee engagement. An increased sense of belonging to the organization will increase employee satisfaction (Das et al., 2017). Employees with a deeper connection to an organization will be more engaged and invested in the daily operations.

The theme of employee involvement was not in alignment with a part of Saks's (2006) multidimensional approach. Although none of the antecedents of Saks's multidimensional approach mention employee involvement, it could be related to what Saks defined as job characteristics. Employee involvement in Saks's model is similar to organizational engagement or a consequence of employee engagement.

Theme 3: Employee Development

Organizations must develop their employees. Participant 1 stated, "We started an emerging leaders program, which is basically a leadership development program." Participant 2 also highlighted the emerging leaders' program, "We've started what we are calling, an emerging leaders' group." Participant 4 added, "I think an important part of this (employee engagement) is employee development." Participant 1 further stated, "We realize it's our employees that are going to bring us into the future, and if we don't find ways to engage them then we are not going to keep them around." Additionally,

Participant 1 stated, "So, like they're a high performer, and we don't really see them moving to another level, but we just want to develop them where they currently are." The participants agreed that developing employees of all performance levels was important.

Company archival documents supported employee development. According to the survey company, "Employee Development and Recognition is a high-scoring area overall. It is evident that employees' professional development is supported and encouraged." Further, all participants confirmed that every employee received an annual review that outlines positive and negative aspects of their performance. These annuals reviews are used to generate goals, objectives, and plans to improve performance.

Employee development has been previously researched in the field of employee engagement. Organizations should have a plan for the career growth and promotion of their employees (Das et al., 2017). Stakeholder engagement strategy has a positive effect on achieving employee-related goals (Lim & Greenwood, 2017). Developing employees requires persistence from managers. Employees need to feel like their organization is investing in their future.

Employees determine how success the organization will be. The most important tools of an organization are its employees (Kang & Sung, 2017). Committed and talented employees need to know their prospects for promotion if they are to remain at a company (Das et al., 2017). Employees perceive the time companies spend training them as an ongoing investment that they want to continue to receive (Das et al., 2017). Employee perceptions of an organization's talent management practices can lead to positive or negative outcomes depending on the execution. Open, fair, transparent, and consistent

talent management practices lead to higher satisfaction for employees, even when the outcomes are not favorable to an individual employee (O'Connor & Crowley-Henry, 2017). All employees can improve with training and development. Keeping employees current on their required skillset will help organizations remain competitive.

Training and development programs should be deliberate in preparing employees for success. Companies must ensure their training programs properly prepare employees for their jobs (Das et al., 2017). Talent management selection procedures should allow all interested employees to demonstrate their own contributions to an organization's success (O'Connor & Crowley-Henry, 2017). Not all employees can become top performers, but all employees can contribute to the success of an organization. Talent management procedures should allow employees interested in moving up in the organization a fair chance to demonstrate their worth.

Employee development does not fit with the work of Saks (2006). Saks's multidimensional approach includes perceived organization support as an antecedent to employee engagement. Although perceived organizational support may include employee development, the model does not detail what perceived organizational support fully entails. In Saks's model, perceived organization support is not inclusive of employee development. This absence of a connection to employee development was reinforced by Suhartanto and Brien (2018), who tested the multidimensional approach of Saks.

Theme 4: Top-Down Approach/Manager Buy In

Managers must implement a top-down approach to employee engagement strategy implementation with their own buy-in to the usefulness of their approaches.

Participant 2 stated, "It is part of our core strategy and core values that we have engaged employees." Participant 1 added, "Managers will make or break engagement," and "Engagement is something that is huge within our leadership team." Participant 5 stated, "Maybe leadership that isn't totally engaged. If you look at any organization, it's a top-down situation more times than not." Participant 2 added, "As a leadership team, we look at what are the areas where we feel like we can put strategies in place to make a difference." Participant 4 further noted,

> Our CEO will then take those important things that come out of the employee engagement survey and recently was kind of some teams and have kind of done some deep dives into what are the most important areas that we need to focus on.

Participant 4 followed-up with, "Our CEO then has communicated those to everyone, that hey, here is the top three areas that we are going to focus on and that we are striving to make improvements in." Participant 1 stated, "We try to keep this at the top and be consistent with our strategies." The top down approach requires managers at all levels to buy in to the process of developing and implementing employee engagement strategy.

The top-down approach was evident in company archival documents via the 2018 employee opinion and engagement survey. Despite the scores of management/supervisors being lowest among the company for employee engagement (but still well above national norms), their subordinates responded 98% positive about their supervisors' support of the organization's goals and providing enough freedom to do their job. Although, some managers were struggling with their own engagement, and managers were not letting their own barriers affect their employees in a negative way.

There is an emphasis for a top-down approach in the employee engagement literature. High-performing managers and leaders generate higher engagement levels (Bailey, Madden, Alfes, & Fletcher, 2017). Managers are responsible for building a culture that allows for the building of interpersonal relationships (Das et al., 2017). Organizational success depends on employee performance; however, managers and leaders have the largest impact on their employees' success.

Saks (2006) did not discuss a top-down approach to increase organizational engagement. Suhartanto and Brien (2018) used Saks's approach to employee engagement and stated that managers need to first focus on engaging to the job before moving on to their employees. Suhartanto and Brien's interpretation of Saks's multidimensional approach required managers to first engage themselves before they can successfully engage their employees.

Theme 5: Time and Flexibility

Flexibility with an employee's discretion over use of his or her work time, schedule, and environment was important to study participants for engaging employees. Participant 2 stated, "Our biggest barrier is actual time to implement the strategies that are necessary to enhance employee engagement." Participant 5 stated, "That flexibility just really helps strengthen our overall culture." Participant 4 stated, "I think within my team, one of the ones that I think is huge is flexibility." Participant 5 stated, "So, flexibility means a lot of things, but our culture is that we expect results, and if you achieve those results by working a 12-hour day then so be it." Participant 5 further stated "It's all about the outcome, not necessary about how you go about getting there."

Participants agreed that flexibility with time was important for engaging employees, especially because study participants considered a lack of time as a limitation to engaging employees.

Time and flexibility are themes in employee engagement literature. Employers use flexible work arrangements to help their employee manage work-life balance (Bakker, 2017). Employees use flexible work arrangements to help manage work-life balance and professional responsibilities (Ugargol & Patrick, 2018). Management support for work flexibility can increase employee innovation and performance (Umair, Abbas, Asif, Hussain, & Muhammad, 2018). Work-life balance is an important aspect of engaging an employee. Flexible work arrangements were positively related to employee engagement (Bakker, 2017; Ugargol & Patrick, 2018). Employees with flexible work arrangements are more engaged than those with little work flexibility (Ugargol & Patrick, 2018). Bal and De Lange (2015) found that the mere availability, not usage of, flexible work arrangements increased employee engagement. A majority of employees who are offered flexible work arrangements will use them (Ugargol & Patrick, 2018). Employees with access to flexible work arrangements will use them, and that will lead to increased levels of employee engagement.

Time and flexibility were not mentioned by Saks (2006). However, Saks listed job satisfaction as an antecedent to employee engagement, and job satisfaction could be improved through the availability of flexible work arrangements. Time and flexibility may relate to perceived organizational and supervisor support. Suhartanto and Brien (2018) used Saks's multidimensional approach to examine employee engagement.

Suhartanto and Brien described perceived organizational support as an employee's belief that an organization has concern for employees' wellbeing. Suhartanto and Brien reinforced that flexible work arrangements fall under the meaning of perceived organizational support from Saks.

Theme 6: Tailored Strategies for Different Demographics

It is important for managers to tailor their employee engagement strategies toward various demographic groups. Participant 2 stated, "We then look at it by functional business unit." Participant 2 further stated, "Again, because in functional groups within business groups have different issues." Participant 5 added, "So, each of these companies kind of gets off into their own group and worries about the different short coming so we may have the surveys" Participant 1 pointed out, "You know what our construction team does is probably going to be a little different from our furniture team." Participant 3 added, "I do not think that there is any one rule that applies to everyone." They agreed that different employees and business units will have different concerns, and it is important to address their varying concerns independently.

Organizational leaders could have leveraged the 2018 employee engagement and opinion survey for use of tailored employee engagement strategies. The documents I received did not detail the thought process of leaders creating employee engagement strategies, but the results of employee opinion and engagement survey supported participant statements about organizational leadership tailoring strategies to various demographics. The 2018 employee opinion and engagement survey results were broken-down in many ways, including location, age range, department, title, supervisor,

company leadership, employee tenure, and other categories. Leaders are able to tailor strategies with this information, as stated by the participants.

Scholars provided support for the use of tailored employee engagement strategies to various demographics in the literature. Engagement strategies affect people in different ways (Jones et al., 2015). Engagement strategies should be tailored for different generations (Barron et al., 2014). Additionally, employers should be prepared for older generations to have higher engagement levels (Rigg et al., 2014), but workload concerns are more problematic for the baby boomer generation (Duxbury & Halinski, 2014). Employers should be prepared to deploy tailored strategies for different demographics.

Tailored strategies were not supported by Saks's (2006) multidimensional approach. Saks did not list any antecedents relating to tailored strategies. Additionally, many of the antecedents were vague or considered a high-level theme, which provides leaders flexibility in how they choose to support the various antecedents of employee engagement. However, because different employees are sensitive to different issues, Saks concluded that a *one size fits all* approach to employee engagement might not be the most effective (p. 614). Leaders should use a tailored approach in creating an organization's employee engagement strategy.

Theme 7: Environment

A healthy employee environment plays a role in employee engagement strategy. The company devoted its resources to helping their clients' employees engage to their workspace through design, layout, and furniture choices. Participant 2 stated, "I mean,

aspirationally [sic], one of the things that we would like to move towards is being

recognized as one of the best places to work." Participant 4 added,

> And what we do here for a living every day is sell office interiors and office
>
> environments, and so I think that was a really important for us to work on our
>
> space and kind of reengage everyone in the work that we do every day.

Participant 1 stated, that the company strongly advocates for their employees to become

engaged to their environment. Participant 1 further stated, "We realize the work setting

itself has a huge play on engagement." The participants agreed that engaging employees

to their workspace is an important aspect of an employee engagement strategy.

Company archival documents references engaging employees to a space or work

environment. The survey company (for the 2018 employee opinion and engagement

survey) reported that 16 people highlighted the employee workspace/environment as an

important aspect of the organization. The organization provided every team member with

Team Affirmation Cards that are the size of a normal business card. The front of the card

stated, "We strive to be honest, reliable, respectful, exceptional, curious, and unified.

Followed by the word Teammates." The back of the card stated the team vision and

mission. Team vision: "To be the clear knowledge leader for connecting people and

space, an irreplaceable partner to each of our customers, and place where highly talented

and engaged people can thrive." Team Mission: "[Company] creates and provides the

best places for people to do their best work. We do this through understanding and

leading practices in connecting architecture, technology, furniture, and services for

healthcare, education, corporate, and large venue environments." Additionally, the

company completed an overhaul of their office space to help their employees engage and

serve as a showroom for their clients to see how a proper space can help an employee

engage.

Employee engagement researchers explained how engaging to a workspace or a

work environment supports employee engagement. Good working environments create

happier working environments that anchor employees to the organization (Chaudhry,

Jariko, Mushtaque, Mahesar, & Ghani, 2017). Anitha (2014) stated that employee

engagement levels are influenced by the work environment promoted by an organization.

Employee engagement and employee satisfaction are positively related to working

environment, training and development, and organizational performance (Chaudhry et al.,

2017). A proper working environment will assist employees with engaging with their job

and organization.

Saks's (2006) approach does not list the physical environment as an antecedent to

employee engagement. According to Saks, for an employee to engage, there is a

psychological component requirement for a work environment rather than a functional or

aesthetic aspect of the physical workspace as reported by the participants. Certain jobs

require particular workspaces to be productive, which may require the ability or

flexibility to use specialized tools and applications.

Applications to Professional Practice

Increased employee engagement levels may lead to a competitive edge. There is

potential future employee engagement research (Bailey et al., 2017). Bakker (2017)

found that only 7.14% of employees were highly engaged with their organizations,

51.38% of employees were neither engaged nor disengaged, and that 41.47% of employees were disengaged with their organizations. Practitioners use employee engagement as a tool because it connects a wide variety of effective approaches to strengthen an organization (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017). Employee engagement is the key to meeting the mutual needs of employees and employers (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017). High employee engagement levels can lead to more benefits for a company.

Through my interviews with participants and my review of company archival documents, I discovered seven themes that leaders were incorporating into their employee engagement strategies. Participants revealed that the communication was the strongest theme being incorporated by participants in this study. Organizations should adapt effective communication protocols in their employee engagement strategies. Without effective communication, an organization will be unable to identify what is important to their employees across business units, position types, or other demographic groups. Organizations also need to develop their employees as a part of their engagement strategy. The participants emphasized involving their employees in decision making and operations of other functional units to help employees see how they fit into the company's mission. Leaders need to help their employees understand how an organization operates in order to develop their skills and knowledge so they can contribute effectively. In addition, employees need flexibility to do their work. To some degree, employee engagement strategy should include flexible work arrangements. Allowing employees flexibility to reach their goals is important for their work-life balance. As long as employees are performing at an agreed upon level and not interfering

with the work of others, leaders should develop flexible work arrangements to aid an employee engagement. Organizations need to adopt strategies that can be tailored for different demographics because different groups have different needs. Moreover, organizations must provide a suitable and functional work space. Leaders need to understand that visual aesthetics will not overcome functional needs. Last, organizations need to ensure that their strategy implementation begins with the company leadership. Employees will notice if their managers and leaders are not fully committed to a strategy. For a strategy to be successful, leaders and managers need to reinforce their own participation and facilitate participation for their employees.

Implications for Social Change

The positive changes in job and organizational relationships may contribute happier, more fulfilled workforce. Organization leaders may consider implementing employee engagement and employee satisfaction strategies (Chaudhry et al., 2017). Additionally, high levels of engagement are beneficial for employees and employers (Bailey et al., 2017). The increases in employee engagement levels are expressed in terms of tangible improvements to individuals, communities, organizations, institutions, cultures, or societies. Local communities will benefit from happier citizens (and their families) through a higher quality of life and the flexibility to participate more in their own community. Further, employers who communicate well with their employees will have the knowledge about what community issues are important to their employees and will be able to contribute time and resources through corporate social responsibility initiatives.

Recommendations for Action

First, I recommend that employers find ways to maximize two-way communication between an organization and its employees. Communication is correlated to employee engagement (Saxena & Srivastava, 2015). Additionally, leaders can use communication strategies to strengthen their employee engagement strategies (Lim & Greenwood, 2017). By keeping communication lines open, employers will be able to continually adjust their employee engagement strategy as issues important to employees change over time. Second, organizations must find ways to involve their employees beyond their job role. Job involvement has been linked to employee engagement (Mackay, Allen, & Landis, 2017). Employees need to understand how they fit within an organization and how their decisions affect other aspects of the business. Employers need to treat their employees as an investment, and employees will recognize this investment. Third, employers need to develop all of their employees, not just top performers. Providing development plans for all employees is essential for a highly engaged workforce (Khan & Altaf, 2015). Fourth, employers need to provide their employers with autonomy and flexibility. Maintaining work-life balance can be tough for many individuals. Leaders should allow their employees flexibility to get their job done as they see fit within reasonable constraints to aid their employee engagement strategy (Ugargol & Patrick, 2018). Fifth, employers must recognize that that no two of their employees are exactly alike. Employee engagement strategies should be tailored to some degree for different employee groups (Saks, 2006). Sixth, employers must provide an environment conducive to employee engagement. Certain job roles require specific tools or

workspace. It is important for employers to understand the needs of their employees when creating their workspace (Anitha, 2014). Employers must tailor their strategies based on communication and feedback from their employees.

Organizational leaders can use the results of this study to build and implement effective employee engagement strategies tailored to their own organization's needs. Mullane et al. (2018) found that organizations need to tailor their strategies to the worksite and employee needs. Just as employees require a tailored approach, no two organizations are exactly alike or are comprised of the same demographics. Every organization's approach to employee engagement should be unique, and I would advise caution against using any one-size-fits-all approach. Additionally, organizational leaders cannot overuse communication in their employee engagement strategies. Communication will allow organizational leaders to find employee development and employee involvement strategy initiatives.

Employees can use flexible work arrangements to apply their full effort at the correct time and place. Finally, leaders who provide a proper and functional work environment will strengthen any employee engagement strategy. I will share the results of this study with the participants and the gatekeeper from the organization, and I will attempt to publish the findings in employee engagement-related publications. I will share my findings with other business professionals at seminars or while attending conferences and training events that I attend. I will also look into helping other organizations through consulting or training opportunities.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings from this study arose from data gathered from organizational leaders involved in creating and executing those strategies. The body of employee engagement has not consistently defined engagement. However, employee engagement researchers can explore what works well for engaging employees, even if the mechanism that makes it work has not been fully explained.

Employee engagement researchers have focused more on qualitative research than quantitative research. Researchers should strive to use quantitative methods in future studies to measure the levels of employee engagement in more settings. Researchers should strive to measure employee engagement to eliminate the confusion when organization leaders attempt to measure their success or improvement.

Further qualitative study should not be discounted because there is still not a consensus about the exact meaning of employee engagement, and this may explain the lack of peer reviewed quantitative measurements. I recommend that researchers focus their efforts on building frameworks that help an organization select and tailor strategies versus trying to find a perfect theoretical explanation for the phenomenon of employee engagement. The potential benefits from a highly engaged workforce could have positive immediate and lasting effects that should be explored without delay. This study was specific to a specialized industry with a large geographical area. Future studies should consider focusing on an organization with a centralized headquarters and a concentration of employees in order to capture the full operational picture of the organization's efforts

before trying to explore organizations with large footprints that have competing cultural influences from different regional norms or other factors.

Reflections

My experience as a Walden University doctoral student was both challenging and rewarding. I have risen to an academic ability that I did not understand was possible. My enhanced academic writing skills have given me a new perspective of what quality research should look like. My personal experience of struggling to engage to my job role or to my organization helped me see the importance behind employee engagement and its potential impact on social change given large scale implantation of employee engagement strategies.

My preconceived notions and personal opinions on the topic were limited. I found employee engagement as a research topic after initially examining toxic leadership as potential topic for my doctoral research. Although employee engagement is not the opposite of toxic leadership, a leader trying to engage his or her employees is moving in the opposite direction of a toxic leader. I found employee engagement to a refreshing and rewarding topic to conduct research on. I now understand how important an employee engagement strategy can be when properly deployed, especially the potential impact for positive social change. After completing this study, I realized that simple business protocols can affect social change.

Conclusion

Some organizational leaders are seeing the potential benefits to a fully engaged workforce. Organizations may receive positive impacts from employee engagement

because (a) low engagement levels reported globally leave ample opportunity for an organization to increase employee engagement levels, (b) employees will be more likely to expend personal resources toward the organization, and (c) employee engagement is positively related to many other outcomes. Further, many aspects of employee engagement strategy are low cost or no cost options. Providing employees with flexible work schedules does not require any extra capital. At the needs or discretion of the organization, a flexible work arrangement can be scaled up to a work from home program by providing an employee a laptop and way to access the company's network.

Organizations need to communicate with their employees and build tailored strategies to respond to their needs. Employee engagement strategies are beneficial to both an employee and their employer. Management and leadership must buy into the effectiveness of employee engagement initiatives in meaningful way, and they will see the effects trickle down to their employees. In turn, highly engaged employees will have better attitudes, intentions, and behaviors, which helps an organization remain competitive.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

A) Before the interview, I will:

• Contact potential participants with an invitation to participate in the study.

• Provide a consent form, and the list of interview questions if interested in

participating.

• Schedule the time and place for the interview.

B) During the interview, I will:

• Obtain the signed consent form prior to start of the interview.

• Confirm participant's agreement for the interview to be recorded.

• Confirm participant's understanding of the right to withdraw voluntarily from

the interview and study at any time, for any reason.

• Address any questions or concerns.

C) After the interview, I will:

• Thank the participant for their contribution to the study.

• Transcribe the interview (via transcription service).

• Conduct analysis.

• Confirm the accuracy of my interpretation with each participant through

member checking.