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Successful Strategies to Engage Employees in the Workplace

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Abstract

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Research revealed that 20% of American employees are not actively engaged in the workplace. Disengaged employees cost the U.S. economy billions of dollars annually in lost productivity. The purpose of this single case study was to explore strategies that small business managers of a privately-owned company used to maintain an engaged work force. The target population consisted of 4 small business managers from the same organization within Fairfax County, Virginia. Leader member exchange was the conceptual framework chosen for this study. Data were collected through semistructured interviews and review of company documents. Member checking was used to address the dependability of data. Data were analyzed using Yin's 5-phased cycle of data analysis and methodological triangulation. The final interpretations revealed 2 major themes: creating and sustaining a cohesive, engaging organizational environment and ensuring effective communications. The contributions of this study to positive social change include encouraging managers and their employees to have a healthier attitude at work, having a better sense of work–life balance, and having pride in belonging. Understanding the contribution of an engaging workforce may enable organizational leaders to improve performance and profits for catalyzing monetary and nonmonetary contributions benefiting communities.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to my parents. I thank you for giving me life, strength, and wisdom, and for always being there when I needed you the most.

Acknowledgments

I give my humble thanks to God for giving me the strength and courage to carry out such a journey and the will power to see it through. I would also like to thank a host of family and friends for their words of encouragement from beginning to end.

And finally, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the following Walden University, Doctor of Business Administration committee members, Dr. Teresa Jepma (Chair), Dr. Annie Brown (Second Committee Member), Dr. Allen Endres (URR), and Dr. Susan Davis (Program Director). Thank you for your support.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Leadership involves influencing a group of individuals who have a common purpose (Northouse, 2013). The primary source of leadership is the leader, and the object of leadership is the follower (Ospina, 2017). To encourage employee engagement, organizations must focus on cultivating a work environment supportive of employees, keeping them motivated and positive about their jobs and the organization (Storm et al., 2014). In this study, I will explore strategies that small business managers of privately-owned companies use to maintain an engaged work force.

Background of the Problem

The success of an organization is dependent upon the commitment of the leadership and the welfare of the employees. Kahn (1990) defined employee engagement as the degree to which individuals invest their physical, cognitive, and emotional energies into their role performance. In contrast, a disengaged work force portends a potential loss in productivity which affects the overall financial performance of the business and the longevity of the business. Wilson (2014) maintained that less than a third of Americans are actively engaged, passionate, enthusiastic, and energetic about their work. Khuong and LeVu (2014) found that employees who feel comfortable about their working environment are likely to work more effectively and enjoy the working process as compared to those who feel uncomfortable. For this reason, organizational leaders must pay close attention to the environmental culture of their organization and strive to develop and implement strategies to create an engaging workplace and a healthier relationship between leaders and the followers.

Problem Statement

In the United States 20% of American employees are not actively engaged in the workplace (Zhang, Avery, Bergsteiner, & More, 2014). Disengaged employees cost the U.S. economy more than $300 billion per year in lost productivity (Fornes, Rocco, & Wollard, 2008). The general business problem is that organizations are being negatively affected by lost profits due to disengaged employees in the workplace. The specific business problem is that some small business managers of privately-owned companies lack strategies to maintain an engaged work force.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the qualitative single case study was to explore strategies that small business managers of privately-owned companies use to maintain an engaged work force. The targeted population included four small business managers from the same organization within Fairfax County Virginia who have been successful in developing and implementing employee engagement strategies. Completing this study may lead to positive social change by influencing employees to have a healthier attitude at work, a better sense of work-life balance, and a pride in belonging. Understanding the contribution of an engaging workforce, may enable organizations to improve performance and profits for catalyzing monetary and nonmonetary contributions benefiting communities.

Nature of the Study

I used a qualitative methodology for this study. A qualitative methodology refers to descriptive data, written or spoken words, and observable behaviors (Taylor, Bogdan,

& DeVault, 2015). As the researcher, using a qualitative methodology enables the exploration of participants' experiences through open-ended interview questions and direct observations. Quantitative researchers use mathematical methods to analyze and collect data (Ludwig & Johnston, 2016). Therefore, a quantitative research method was not appropriate because my study will not focus on numerical data. Mixed method research involves the use of qualitative and quantitative data in a single research project (Halcomb & Hickman, 2015). The complexities of using both qualitative and quantitative methods were beyond the scope of my research intent. Therefore, a mixed method approach was not appropriate for my study.

I used a single case study design in this study. Yin (2014) maintained that using the case study allows the researcher to investigate a contemporary phenomenon in depth, and in its real-world context. Therefore, the case study design was the best design for exploring small business managers' experiences concerning strategies to create an engaged work environment. In a phenomenology study, researchers focus on how humans experience a phenomenon, and how people construct meaning and understanding of their lived experiences (Hepworth, Gruewald, & Walton, 2014). Because I am seeking how to engage people, phenomenology was not the most suitable design for my study. In an ethnographic design, researchers participate in the activities of the cultural group under investigation (Zou et al., 2014). Because my study is not about group cultural activities, ethnography was not the appropriate design for my study. Therefore, the single case study was the best design for exploring business managers' experiences regarding developing and implementing strategies to engage their employees.

Research Question

What strategies do small business managers of privately-owned companies use to maintain an engaged work force?

Interview Questions

The interview questions to collect data to explore the research question include:

1. What do you consider as an engaging work environment?
2. What strategies do you use to engage your employees?
3. What are your responsibilities with regard to engaging your employees?
4. Based upon your experiences, what are some of the components of employee engagement that affect your employees?
5. How would you describe the relationship between organizational performance and employee engagement?
6. What, if any, barriers have you experienced with regard to implementing the strategies for engaging your employees?
7. How have you addressed the barriers?
8. What additional information would you like to share on this topic?

Conceptual Framework

The theory relevant to this proposed qualitative study is the leader-member exchange theory (LMX). LMX addresses leadership as a process centered on the interactions between leaders and followers (Northouse, 2013). Northouse (2013) found that George Graen and Mary Uhl-Bien were instrumental in the development of the LMX theory which dates to 1995. Northouse maintained that the LMX theory was originally known as the vertical dyad linkage (VDL) theory, developed by Fred Dansereau, George Graen, and William Haga, in 1975.

The LMX was appropriate to this study of employee engagement strategies by illuminating the importance of establishing a stable relationship between leaders and their subordinates. Loi, Chan, and Lam (2014) maintained that when LMX quality is high, employees see their roles as more defined and stable in the organization because the employees are treated as in-group members rather than out-group members. The central tenets underlying the LMX theory are (a) mutual respect, (b) trust, and (c) obligation (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

Operational Definitions

Disengaged: employees with high levels of discontentment and negative opinion on organizational approach (Bhuvanaiah & Raya, 2014).

Employee engagement: the level of commitment and involvement an employee has towards their organization and its values (Anitha, 2014).

Engaged: a psychological state of being engrossed in one's role as an employee and team member (Kang & Sung, 2017).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

The purpose of the qualitative single case study was to explore strategies that small business managers of a privately-owned company use to maintain an engaged work force. The following subsection includes the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) maintained that assumptions are statements that are taken for granted or accepted as true without concrete proof, limitations are potential weakness or problems in the study not within the control of the researcher, and delimitations refer to the scope and boundaries of the study.

Assumptions

Assumptions are thoughts believed to be true without a means to verify whether they are (Humphrey, 2014). Two assumptions were noted in this study. First, the participants will be open and honest during the interview. Second, the participants will provide information relevant to the topic of this study.

Limitations

Limitations are potential weaknesses in the study that are not within the researcher's control (Cunha & Miller, 2014). Two limitations affect this study. First, validity of the research findings relies upon the responses from participants, interview notes, and data collected from company documentation. Second, the sample will be limited to those who meet the criteria and agree to participate in the interview.

Delimitations

Delimitations refer to the boundaries established within a study (Ody-Brasire & Vermeulen, 2014). Two delimitations are bounded by this study. First, the study is delimited to a single small business to narrow the scope of this qualitative case study. Second, the scope of the study is limited to the geographical location of Fairfax County Virginia.

Significance of the Study

This study is of value to the practice of business because small business managers could benefit from the study findings by modifying the methods used to maintain a more engaged work force. Further, the findings could provide insight by helping managers understand the need for developing and fostering a cooperative and productive business atmosphere. The results of this study could contribute to improving employee engagement practices. The contributions to positive social change include encouraging employees to having a healthier attitude at work, having a better sense of work-life balance, and having pride in belonging. Understanding the contribution of an engaging workforce, may enable organizations to improve performance and profits for catalyzing monetary and nonmonetary contributions benefiting communities.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The intent of this qualitative case study is to explore strategies that small business managers use to create an engaged work environment. The content of the literature review provides an in-depth review of 15 seminal books, and 141 articles and journals. I have 126 sources within the literature review with 108 (85%) peer-reviewed. In addition, 132 of the 156 (85%) sources in the reference list have a publication date between 2014 and 2017. Furthermore, 136 (87%) of the total 156 references are peer-reviewed. The focus areas for the literature review are organized by the following topics: leadership member exchange, leadership, leadership styles, organizational culture, employee engagement, and employee motivation. Subtopics include leadership theories, leadership traits, transformational leadership, transactional leadership, authentic leadership, servant leadership, charismatic leadership, and disengaged employees. I accessed source information for this study through the Walden University library, using a variety of different databases such as Google Scholar, ProQuest, EBSCOhost, to include the

Ulhrich directory to verify peer-reviewed sources. The keywords I used during my search include: *leadership, employee engagement, job satisfaction, disengaged, organizational culture, and effective communication*.

Leader Member Exchange (LMX) Theory

Northouse (2013) found that LMX addresses leadership as a process centered on the interactions between leaders and followers. Northouse (2013) maintained that the LMX theory makes several potential contributions to the understanding of the leadership process. Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) found that employees' relationship with their supervisor have been often conceptualized in terms of quality LMX. Casimir et al. (2014) asserted that LMX is based on the dyadic relationships between leaders and followers. The quality of the leader and follower relationship depends upon how the leader perceives the follower (Casimir, 2014). In comparison, Kim, Poulston and Sankaran (2016) described LMX as the dyadic work relationship between supervisors and their subordinates. Loi, Chan, and Lam (2014) noted that when LMX quality is high, employees see their roles be more defined and stable in the organization because they are treated as in-group members rather than out-group members.

Zacher et al. (2014) maintained that high quality LMX relationships are characterized by (a) mutual liking, (b) trust, (c) respect, (d) obligation, and (e) reciprocal influence between leaders and followers. Zacher noted that in these relationships, leaders support their followers beyond what is generally expected, and followers engage in more autonomous and responsible work activities. In contrast, in low quality LMX relationships, leaders provide their followers only with what they need to perform, and followers do only their prescribed job task (Zacher et al., 2014).

LMX suggests that it is important to recognize the existence of in-groups and out-groups within a group or an organization (Northouse, 2013). In-group members are willing to do more than is required in their job description and look for innovative ways to advance the group's ideas, as a result, their given more responsibility and more opportunities. Whereas out-group members operate strictly within their perspective organizational roles, for their efforts they receive the standard benefits defined in the job description (Northouse, 2013). Gran and Uhl-Bien (1995) maintained that LMX is related to performance, organizational commitment, job climate, innovation, organizational citizenship behavior, empowerment, procedural and distributive justice, and career progress. Furthermore, with regards to leadership types, Gran and Uhl-Bien expressed that leader member exchange is both transactional and transformational.

Leadership

Academic researchers have defined and conceptualized leadership in many ways. Silva (2016) maintained that leadership is the process of interactive influence that occurs when, in a given context, some people accept someone as their leader to achieve a common goal. In comparison, Northouse (2013) stated that leadership is a process, leadership involves influence, leadership occurs in groups, and leadership involves common goals. Northouse maintained that there are two forms of leadership, assigned and emergent. Assigned, which is based on a formal title or position in an organization, and emergent, which results from what one does and how one acquires support from followers (Northouse, 2013). Table 1 contains various definitions of leadership.

Table 1

Definitions of Leadership

Author	Definitions
Ho, 2016	Leadership is a social effectiveness process through which the leader explores, seeks, and mobilizes the voluntary participation of followers.
Northouse, 2013	Leadership is a process, leadership involves influence, leadership occurs in groups, and leadership involves common goals.
Schein, 1992	Ability to step outside the culture to start evolutionary change processes that are more adaptive.
Yukl, 2002	Process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how it be done effectively, the process of facilitating individuals and collective efforts to accomplish the shared objectives.

Furthermore, Northouse (2013) maintained that leadership is a process that is similar to management, both involve influence, working with people, and effective goal accomplishment. Northouse argued that the overriding function of management is to provide order and consistency to organizations, whereas the primary function of leadership is to produce change and catalyze breakthroughs. Bennis and Nanus (1985) maintained that there is a significant difference between the two. Bennis and Nanus argued that *manage* means to accomplish activities and master routines, whereas to *lead* means to influence others and create visions for change. Reed (2017) explored how accountability, engagement, communication, vision, and embodiment of critical intangibles of being a leader, can help executive leaders drive organizational performance to higher levels. Reed described *accountability* as being transparent, sharing organizational goals and priorities, and reporting the progress toward those goals. Reed asserted that good leaders at every level make fostering employee engagement a primary goal. With regards to communication, Reed noted that the most powerful component of leadership communication is listening to employees. The vision of leaders involves strategic planning and positioning the organization to optimally serve its consumers. Critical intangibles of leadership include trusting in others and being trustworthy, having integrity and credibility, and understanding people (Reed, 2017). Ospina (2017) maintained that the primary source of leadership is the leader, and the object of leadership is the follower. Ospina asserted that when leaders direct influence on the followers, leadership happens. Ospina stated that the end result of leadership is that followers accept the leader’s vision, feeling engaged in a common enterprise that will generate motivation. Katz (1955) asserted that effective administration depends on three basic personal skills, technical skills, human skills, and conceptual skills. Katz noted that technical skills include competencies in a specialized area, analytical ability, and the ability to use appropriate tools and techniques. Human skills are abilities that help leaders work effectively with subordinates, peers, and superiors to accomplish organizational goals. Conceptual skills are the ability to work with ideas and concepts (Katz, 1955). In comparison, Northouse (2013) asserted that leaders most possess an array of skills that will give them the ability to use one's knowledge and competencies to accomplish a set of goals or objectives.

Leadership theories. One of the most widely recognized theories of leadership is Fiedler's contingency theory. The contingency theory is a leader match theory that matches leaders to appropriate situations (Fiedler & Chemers, 1974). The contingency theory is characterized by the following three factors: leader member relations, task structure, and position power. Leader-member relations consist of the group atmosphere and the degree of confidence, loyalty, and attraction that followers feel for their leaders. Task structure is the degree to which the requirements of a task are clear and spelled out. Position power is the amount of authority a leader has to reward or punish followers (Northouse, 2013).

The path-goal theory focuses on how leaders motivate subordinates to accomplish designated goals. The theory emphasizes the relationship between the leader's style and the characteristics of the subordinates and the work settings. The basic principles of the theory were derived from the expectancy theory which suggests that employees are motivated if they feel competent, rewarded, and if their work is valued (Northouse, 2013). House (1971) argued that in the Path-Goal theory of leadership, leaders achieve effectiveness by helping subordinates achieve work goals and personal outcomes. House stated that leaders smooth the path by clarifying the goal, reducing road blocks and pitfalls, and increasing the opportunities for personal satisfaction. In comparison to leader member exchange, Cote (2017) argued that both theories focus on influencing and motivating employees in an organizational environment. Furthermore, Cote noted that these theories can work in all levels of an organization, and for all types of tasks and projects.

Leadership traits. Stogdill (1974) suggested that successful leaders had the following traits: a strong drive for responsibility and task completion, vigor and persistence in pursuit of goals, originality in problem solving, self-confident, a willingness to accept consequences of their decision and actions, a readiness to absorb interpersonal stress. Kiare et al. (2016) maintained that leaders are born with personality traits, and that certain traits are associated with leadership proficiency. Northouse (2013) maintained that certain individuals have special innate or inborn characteristics or qualities that make them leaders. Solaja et al. (2016) explored five factors associated with personality: openness, conscientious, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism.

Openness: the dimension ranging from outgoing, liberal, interested in new things, and imaginative to reserved, conservative, traditional, and conforming (Solaja et al., 2016).

Conscientious: the continuum ranging from organized, careful, and determined to careless, and weak willed (Solaja et al., 2016).

Extraversion: a person who prefers group activities, group sports, large gatherings, lots of friends and acquaintances, and social endeavors (Solaja et al., 2016).

Agreeableness: the extremes of stubborn versus easy going or suspicious versus trusting (Solaja et al., 2016).

Neuroticism: the dimension of emotional stability (Solaja et al., 2016).

Leadership Styles

Gandolfi and Stone (2016) defined leadership style as an intentional means by which a leader influences a group of people in an organization. Northouse (2013) maintained that leadership styles are classified into four categories of direct and supportive behavior (a) *the directing approach* where the leader focuses communication on goal achievement; (b) *the coaching approach* where the leader focuses communication on both achieving goals and meeting subordinates socioemotional needs; (c) *the supporting approach* where the leader does not focus on goals but uses supportive behavior that includes listening, praising, asking for input and giving feedback; and (d) *the delegating approach* where the delegated leader lessens involvement in planning, control of details, and goal clarification (Northouse, 2013).

Transformational leadership. Qu, Janssen, and Shi (2015) asserted that transformational leaders encourage employees to craft new ways of doing things, to initiate creative ideas, and exploratory thinking, and to identify and commit to long-term goals and mission. Yukl (2013) argued that transformational leadership refers to leaders with an appealing vision for their team who intellectually stimulate others in a way that is demanding and appreciative of the individual needs of the team. In subsequent research, Northouse (2013) argued that transformational leadership incorporates idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. Northouse described idealize influence as leaders who act as strong role models for followers. Inspirational motivation describes leaders who communicate high expectations to followers; they inspire followers through motivation to be committed to a shared vision of the organization. Intellectual stimulation describes leadership that stimulates followers to be creative and innovative and to challenge their own beliefs and values. Individual consideration is representative of leaders who provide a supportive climate; they listen to the individual needs of the followers (Northouse, 2013). Transformational leadership is the process whereby a person engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower (Northouse, 2013). Transformational leadership fosters openness to new approaches and personal growth due to intellectual stimulation and individual coaching and support (Hentrich, 2017).

Bass (1985) maintained that every leader uses both transactional and transformational leadership to some extent; however, the most effective leaders use transformational leadership more frequently than transactional. The strongest effects of leaders on followers occur as a consequence of leadership that is transformational rather than quid pro quo or transactional (Bass, 1985). Transformational leaders encourage team members to think outside the box, enabling them to visualize a much bigger picture and ensuring their commitment towards the effective accomplishment of this vison (To, 2015). In addition, Burns, Bradley, and Weiner (2012) maintained that transformational leaders influence through a vision, motivate through inspiration, stimulate the intellect of subordinates, and display individual consideration. Popli and Rizvi (2015) maintained that transactional leadership is characterized by a leader who motivates and appeals to the ideals and moral values of subordinates. Transformational leaders encourage problem solving and rationality among followers (Raj & Srivastava, 2017). Furthermore, Bass and Riggio (2006) suggested that transformational leadership is especially effective during times of organizational change because transformational leaders can reframe employees' perceptions of change to view it as an opportunity rather than a threat. Furthermore, transformational leaders often change organizational processes and systems to achieve an exciting future, delegate authority to employees to come forward and accept responsibility and seek higher levels of commitment (Boehm et al., 2015). Afsar et al. (2016) asserted that transformational leaders articulate a compelling vision, engage in creative process development, initiate and implement novel ideas, and facilitate diffused learning to bring change. Fischer (2016) maintained that transformational leaders care about their followers, and followers feel secure in their relationship with the leader. Caillier and Sa (2017) maintained that transformational leaders seek to motivate employees by stimulating them intellectually, providing them with individualized attention, challenging them to achieve high standards, and articulating a compelling vision.

Mozammel (2016) stated that transformational leadership is needed to facilitate employee engagement. Effelsberg and Solga (2015) concluded that transformational leaders provide inspirational motivation by communicating an attractive and appealing mission that appeals to employees. Darty-Baah (2015) noted that transformational leadership epitomizes the ideal leadership style required for the organization and by employees because of the significant effect on the organizational outcomes. Men (2014) maintained that transformational leaders take a genuine interest in the well-being of employees, foster a climate of trust, nurture confidence in their followers, and encourage individual development.

Raj and Srivastava (2017) maintained that the role of transformational leadership in enhancing firms' innovativeness has become important to secure a sustainable competitive edge. Raj and Srivastava examined the relationship by introducing organizational learning as a mediator. The results of the study showed that transformational leadership style promotes employees to accumulate tacit knowledge and use it productively, which is only possible when a firm develops the capacity to learn (Raj & Srivastava, 2017). Yildiz and Simsek (2016) found that transformational leaders are known to inspire and motivate their followers, thereby leading to enhanced job satisfaction. Yildiz and Simsek asserted that the underlying mechanisms for transformational leadership to affect employee satisfaction are trust in the community, the leader, and the self. Yildiz and Simsek investigated the mediating effects of trust and self-efficacy on the relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction. The results of the study showed that the relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction is fully mediated by both trust and self-efficacy (Yildiz & Simsek, 2016). Li et al. (2017) investigated how each dimension of transformational leadership directly and indirectly influences follower's change-oriented behaviors. Li et al. examined followers' identification with leaders as an intervening variable between the four dimensions of transformational leadership: core transformational behavior, high-performance expectations, individual support, and intellectual stimulation; and followers' taking charge behavior. The results of the study showed that (a) core transformational behaviors were nonsignificant, (b) high-performance expectations were significant, (c) individualized support exerted a significant indirect effect, and (d) intellectual stimulation directly encourages followers to question and change the status quo, intellectual stimulation encourage problem solving and creativity (Li et al., 2017).

Yukl (2013) maintained that by communicating a desirable, inspirational, and attainable vision, transformational leaders give followers a sense of meaning within the organization. Yukl found that leadership at different levels of an organization directly or indirectly determines organizational culture, climate, and communications. Mishra, Boynton, and Mishra (2014) maintained that in both theory and practice, internal communication is critical to building relationships with employees. Further, internal communication between managers and employees should enhance trust and lead to greater employee engagement within the company. Ruben and Gigliotti (2017) noted that what an organizational leader says can be an important message, however, equally and sometimes more important is what a leader does not say, how a leader responds to what others say, or how he or she fails to respond. Ruben and Gigliotti maintained that beyond the oral and written messages, nonverbal and material elements are also potentially significant elements of the communication environment. Men (2014) found that transformational leadership emphasizes listening, openness, feedback, participation, and relationship which are key attributes of symmetrical communication.

Transactional leadership. Transactional leadership is viewed as leadership that does not individualize the needs of subordinates or focuses on their personal development Northouse (2013). Yahaya and Ebrahim (2016) noted that transactional leaders tend to focus on transactions in furtherance of a set of goals rather than show concern for the people executing those goals. Tung (2016) asserted that in a transactional leadership style, leader or follower orientation is predicated on a set of mutual benefits. In comparison, Birasnav (2014) maintained that transactional leadership is exhibited in the organizations based on a series of exchanges taking place between leader and followers. Furthermore, Geier (2016) noted that leadership is not static and that there is no specific leadership style that suits all situations and all contexts, and that effective leaders behave differently depending on the situation. Geier argued that in extreme events, a leader needs to be adaptable, and a transactional versus transformational leadership style may be more effective concerning increasing followers' performance.

Deichmann and Stam (2015) noted that transactional leaders plan goals to be achieved with an emphasis on clarifying roles, task requirements and expectations to followers. Deichmann and Stam suggested that transactional leaders perform better under conditions of certainty, stability, routine tasks, and less dynamic contexts. Deichmann and Stam concluded that transactional leaders develop an understanding with their followers by mutual exchange where good deeds and fulfillment of goals are rewarded and bad deeds and inability to achieve goals are punished. In agreement with Deichmann and Stam's (2015) findings, Epitropaki and Martin (2013) stated that transactional leadership, managers, and followers meet to exchange valued outcomes by clarifying roles and expectations, and both are rewarded based on desired contributions and performance. Oberfield (2014) maintained that transactional leaders establish clear performance targets, observe employee attainment towards those targets, and reward or punish employees based on their progress towards attaining those objectives. Raj and Srivastava (2017) maintained that transactional leadership provides a vision and a mission, and encourages problem solving and rationality among followers. Transactional leadership involves exchanges between leaders and followers designed to provide benefits to both (McCleskey, 2014).

Authentic leadership. Authentic leadership occurs when individuals enact their true selves in their role as a leader (Leory et al., 2015). Authentic leadership is characterized by four core behaviors: balanced processing, relational transparency, internalized moral perspective, and self-awareness (Read & Laschinger, 2015). Authentic leaders know who they are, and do not try to imitate others (Hsieh & Wang, 2015). Rahimnia and Sharifirad (2015) asserted that authentic leadership positively influences self-awareness and self-regulated behaviors on the part of both leaders and followers. Furthermore, authentic leaders positively and continuously influence employees through their genuine words and actions (Hsieh & Wang, 2015). Walumbwa et al. (2008) maintained that authentic leaders are in tune with their personal strengths and weakness as well as how their strengths and weaknesses are perceived by others. Walumbwa et al. (2008) maintained that authentic leadership positively relates to organizational citizenship behaviors, organizational commitment, and satisfaction with the supervisor. Edu-Valsania, Moriano, and Molero (2016) noted that authentic leadership is characterized by leaders who have (a) high levels of self-awareness, (b) balance in decision making, (c) transparent communication, and (d) prioritize collective interests and the development of their collaborators. Milic et al. (2017) examined the impact of authentic leadership capabilities on learning organization at the organizational level through employee affective commitment. Milic found that that perceived authentic leadership capabilities moderately and positively influence employee affective commitment, which affects the learning organization at the organizational level. Authentic leaders interact with followers in ways that focus on emphasizing people's strengths rather than weaknesses (Laschinger & Fida, 2014).

Servant leadership. Northouse (2013) stated that servant leadership originated in the writing of Greenleaf (1970, 1972, and 1977). Northouse maintained that servant leadership emphasizes that leaders be attentive to the concerns of their followers, empathize with them, and nurture them. Northouse concluded that servant leaders put followers first, empower them, and help them develop their full personal capacities. Liden et al. (2015) discussed how Greenleaf stressed the importance of leaders prioritizing the support and development of followers by setting the example through demonstrating honesty, compassion, and hard work. Servant leadership establishes a serving culture through which followers are taught to prioritize the needs of others before their own (Liden et al., 2014). Carter and Baghurst (2014) maintained that servant leadership positively influences employee engagement. Servant leadership is a leadership philosophy which addresses: ethics, customer experience, and employee engagement while creating a unique organizational culture where both leaders and followers come together as a team to reach organizational goals and avoid exercising power or position as a form of leadership (Carter & Baghurst, 2014).

Charismatic leadership. Krume (2015) maintained that a charismatic leader has influence, inspires, motivates, and instills confidence among followers. Krume asserted that charismatic leaders create an atmosphere of change and articulate an idealized vision of a better future. Grabo et al. (2017) defined charismatic leadership as a signaling process in which a leader conveys their ability to solve urgent coordination and cooperation challenges in groups. Grabo maintained that the signaling process consists of (a) attracting attention to recruit followers, (b) making use of extraordinary rhetorical abilities and knowledge of cultural symbols and rituals, (c) minimizing the perceived risks of cooperation, and (d) aligning followers with shared goals. Charismatic leadership behavior refers to the behavioral characteristics of leaders who are recognized by their followers, and have a strong influence on followers' emotions, values, beliefs, and behaviors (Yang & Zhu, 2016). Shao et al. (2017) found that charismatic leadership is identified as among the most critical leadership style-influencing individual behaviors. Charismatic leaders inspire followers by talking optimistically about what needs to be accomplished in the future and instilling in their follower's positive ideals that are related to desired outcomes (Shao et al., 2017). Charismatic leaders know who they are and what they believe in and have the power to convey confidence in their vision to the followers (Krume, 2015). One of the most important attributes of charismatic leaders is their ability to be highly motivational (Horn et al., 2015).

Organizational Culture

Manley (2008) maintained that several important elements must be present to develop a culture of effectiveness: shared governance, role clarification, transformational leadership, open communication, teamwork, safety, person-centeredness, support and challenge, lifelong learning, and involvement and participation by stakeholders. Burns, Bradley, and Weiner (2012) maintained that culture comprises the fundamental values, assumptions, and beliefs by members of an organization. Barbars (2016) noted that organizational culture is defined as a set of values and beliefs shared among members of an organization. Moran and Lynch (2017) maintained that organizational culture is the group shared character that arises out of common experiences and hardships that have occurred during the organization's lifecycle. The concept of organizational culture originates in cultural anthropology and is popular within the organizational behavior, management, and marketing literature (Schein, 1992). Schein asserted that organizational culture refers to the values and beliefs that provide norms of expected behaviors that employees might follow. Belias and Koustelios (2014) described organization culture as a series of attitudes and behaviors adopted by an organizations' employees, which affects its function and total well-being. Benawa, Martoredjo, and Laurentius (2017) maintained that organizational culture is a system or set of values believed by members of an organization and thus serves unique characteristics distinguishing one organization from the others. Organizational culture includes: innovation, risk-taking, result oriented, orientation for human respect, orientation to teamwork, competitiveness, analysis accuracy, justice, and tolerance (Benawa et al., 2017).

Warrick (2017) argued that a major factor in the success of an organization is its culture. Organizational culture can significantly influence the performance and effectiveness of a company, the morale, and productivity of its employees, and ability to attract, motivate and retain talented people (Warrick, 2017). Organizational culture describes the environment in which people work and the influence it has on how they think, act, and experience work (Warrick, Milliman, & Ferguson, 2016). Organizational culture represents the shared beliefs, values, attitudes, norms of behavior of people in an organization (Wagner et al., 2014). However, leaders can also create unhealthy cultures, an ineffective leader who is not a good fit for the desired culture, or a good leader who makes bad decisions that impact an organization's culture can break down or damage a culture that took decades to build (Warrick, 2017).

Organizational Commitment

Agarwal and Sajid (2017) maintained that organizational commitment is the employee's psychological state, with respect to his or her relationship with the organization. El-Kassar et al. (2017) maintained that commitment results from an assessment of situations found at the work place linking employees to their organization, and their efforts towards achieving goals. Meyer and Allen (1991) proposed a three-component model to describe multiple motivational bases of organizational commitment: continuance commitment, affective commitment, and normative commitment. Continuance commitment reflects one's perceived costs of leaving the organization and perceptions about other available employment alternatives. Affective commitment refers to the individual's identification with, involvement in, and emotional attachment to the organization. Normative commitment captures the individual's felt obligation to remain in the organization (Potipiroon & Ford, 2017).

Cicekli and Kabasakal (2017) explored the relationships between promotion, development, and recognition opportunities at work and organizational commitment, and whether these relationships are moderated by the job opportunities employees have in other organizations. The results of the analyses showed that opportunities for development and recognition are predictors of organizational commitment, that job opportunities employees have in other organizations negatively moderate the relationship between recognition opportunity at work and organizational commitment, and that promotion opportunity does not predict organizational commitment (Cicekli & Kabasakal, 2017). Luo et al. (2017) investigated the mediating role of collective identity in the relations among transformational leadership, procedural justice, and employee organizational commitment. Law found that transformational leadership and procedural justice are good predictors of collective employee identity and organizational commitment. Furthermore, Luo noted that in addition to a strong impact on employee commitment, collective identity partially mediates the effects of transformational leadership and procedural justice on employee commitment (Luo et al., 2017).

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement was first defined by Kahn (1990) as the simultaneous employment and expression of a person’s preferred self in task behaviors that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence, and active full performance. Kahn noted engagement occurs on three distinct levels: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. Kahn (1990) maintained that cognitive engagement originates from an employee’s appraisal of whether their work is meaningful, safe, and if they have sufficient levels resources to complete their work. Kahn further noted that when employees are emotionally engaged with their work, they invest personal resources such as pride, trust, and knowledge. Weerasooriya and De Alwis (2017) maintained that employee engagement is one of the most crucial factors of any organization's performance as well as successful implementation of any new dynamic changes.

Furthermore, with regards to behavioral engagement, Kahn (1990) described this form of engagement as what we can see someone do. Stoyanova and Iliev (2017) defined employee engagement as the relation of the employee to the organization and its leader. Stoyanova and Iliev asserted that employees should feel recognized and valued. Stoyanova and Iliev noted that employees need attention and want to see evidence that someone is thinking of them as individuals. Stoyanova and Iliev stated that engagement can be defined as the relation of the employee to the organization and its leader. Stoyanova and Iliev found that the following indictors determine the level of employee engagement: (a) availability of inspiring working environment and development, (b) opportunity to participate in decision-making and responsibility, (c) provisions of internal and external training for employees of all ages, (d) flexible working hours and teleworking, (e) remuneration and well-developed bonus systems, and (f) additional benefits. Stoyanova and Iliev concluded that the engaged employee is one who is ready to make further efforts for the success of the company.

To encourage employee engagement, organizations must focus on cultivating a work environment supportive of employees, keeping them motivated and positive about their jobs and the organization (Storm et al., 2014). Popli and Rizvi (2015) also stressed that engagement is the extent to which employees put discretionary effort into their work, beyond the required minimum to get the job done, in the form of extra time, brainpower, or energy. Furthermore, Rao (2017) stated that employee engagement is about connecting the hands, heads, and hearts of the employees with the vision and mission of their organizations. Rao asserted that employee engagement (a) improves performance and productivity to give competitive edge over others, (b) minimizes turnover and maximizes morale, and (c) provides customer satisfaction and improves the organizational bottom line. Rao concluded that workers have three prime needs, interesting work, recognition for doing a good job, and being informed of issues.

Gupta (2015) argued that employee engagement is the point at which employee dedication, both emotional and rational exist-in relation to achieve the mission, and vision of the organization. Furthermore, Gupta noted that career development, opportunities for personal development, leadership, clarity of company values, and empowerment are principal factors regarding employee engagement. In addition to his principal factors, Gupta identified five strategies for improving employee engagement: encourage the employees' involvement in companywide initiatives, encourage creativity and innovation, encourage open communication, provide educational opportunities, and share information. Cardus (2013) noted that achieving employee engagement is a systems solution. Cardus maintained that there are five levers that can increase employee engagement (a) competent managers, (b) broad goals that are established within the proper context, (c) objective measures of progress and regress, (d) necessary resources to get the job done, and (e) sufficient autonomy to do their best work.

Harshitha (2015) stated that employee engagement is a route to business success. Harshitha maintained that an engaged workplace encourages commitment, energy and productivity form all those involved to help improve business performance. Harshitha concluded that employee engagement benefits everyone involved in the business by creating an informed, involved and productive workplace that helps propel business towards its goals (Harshitha, 2015). In comparison to Harshita's views, Anitha (2014) defined employee engagement as the level of commitment and involvement an employee has towards their organization and its values. Anitha maintained that engaged employees go beyond the call of duty to perform their role in excellence. Schaufeli et al. (2002) defined employee engagement as a positive, fulling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. According to Schaufeli et al., vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, reflecting a readiness to devote effort in one's work and persistence even in the face of difficulties. Dedication is characterized by a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge, and it represents a particularly strong identification with one's work. Absorption is characterized by being fully concentrated and immersed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly, and one has difficulty disengaging oneself from work (Schaufeli, 2002). High employee engagement results in more enthusiastic, satisfied, and committed employees (Lapoint & Liprie-Spence, 2017).

Kahn (1990) argued that there are three predictors of engagement at work: meaningfulness, safety, and availability. Kahn described meaningfulness as the sense of return on investments of the self-in-role performances. Safety is the sense of being able to show and employ the self without fear of negative consequences. Availability is possessing physical, emotional, and psychological resources for investing the self in role performance (Kahn, 1990). Byrne (2015) considered employee engagement as having a transforming quality where the employee not only embraces the work but also finds meaningful accomplishment. Hollis (2015) maintained that an engaged workplace includes trust and support from the boss and a sense of safety in the environment. Eldor and Vigoda-Gadot (2016) maintained that employee engagement represents a work-related state of mind characterized by feelings of vigor, fulfillment, enthusiasm, absorption, and dedication. Shuck et al. (2017) defined employee engagement as a positive, active, work-related psychological state operationalized by the maintenance, intensity, and direction of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral energy.

Whiteoak and Mohamed (2016) examined how safety incidents affect construction workers' levels of engagement. Whiteoak and Mohamed concluded that small improvements in workers perceptions of safety can bring about significant improvements in employee engagement and productivity. Whiteoak and Mohamed concluded that feeling safe is a psychological condition that appears to be linked to engagement and the likelihood of being involved in an accident. Saks (2017) described five barriers that make it difficult for organizations to translate employee engagement research into practice. Saks maintained that organizations need to decide how to define engagement; the appropriate referent for engagement, how to measure engagement, the primary drivers of engagement, and the development of an organizational engagement strategy. Saks concluded that organizations that can overcome these barriers would be more likely to increase the engagement of their employees and reap the benefits of an engaged workforce.

Popli and Rizvi (2016) explored the roles of leadership style and employee engagement as drivers of service orientation. Popli and Rizvi maintained that the study provides evidence to support that the relationship between leadership styles and service orientation is impacted by employee engagement. The results suggested that organizations need to develop systems and processes that focus on the employee and employee engagement for definitive outcomes. Furthermore, the research also emphasizes that leadership and employee engagement together influence specific employee attitudes and behavior (Popli & Rizvi, 2016). Jha and Kumar (2016) described engagement as a two-way process between employees and an organization. Jha and Kumar maintained that engagement is a strategy to enhance the productivity and performance of an employee, and a process to ensure the commitment, motivation, and contribution of an employee towards achieving the organization’s goals and values.

Madan (2017) maintained that engaged employees tend to be (a) better performers and highly motivated, (b) increase loyalty in the organization and contribute significantly to the success of the organization, (c) increase productivity and profitability of an organization, (d) better team players and provide whole hearted support to their colleagues, and (e) form an emotional bond with the organization and hence have a remarkably good attitude towards customers and clients. Furthermore, Madan found that engaged employees help in improving the overall culture and provide better customer satisfaction, contribute towards a reduction in the levels of absenteeism and employee turnover and increased levels of employee satisfaction, and act as a source of competitive advantage for the organization and provide sustainability to the organization.

Disengaged employees. The opposite of employee engagement is employee disengagement. Cowart (2014) asserted that employee disengagement is the single most important factor in declining productivity, which leads to higher absenteeism, higher costs of doing business, and all-around poor performance. Kahn (1990) maintained that disengagement is seen as a lack of energy, emotion, and thought, characterized by passive, incomplete role-performance. Kahn described disengagement as the uncoupling of selves from work roles. Byrne (2015) maintained that disengaged employees go through the motions, they are physically present but mentally drifting to other ideas while potentially delegating tasks to other colleagues. In addition, disengaged employees erode the bottom line and lower morale. Engaged employees are more productive, more customer-focused, and drive profit and revenue (Heymann, 2015).

Kumar and Pansari (2015) found that the highest level of growth in profits (10% to 15%) occurred in a group of companies whose employees were highly engaged. The lowest level of growth in profit (0% to 1%) occurred in a group of companies whose employees were disengaged. Kumar and Panari argued that an organization's overall employee engagement level is directly influenced by job satisfaction, connectedness, attitudes, loyalty, and commitment. Furthermore, keeping employees engaged can have a major impact on an organization's success (Kumar & Pansari, 2015). Rao (2017) stated that employee engagement is about connecting the hands, heads, and hearts of the employees with the vision and mission of their organizations. Organizational leaders who uphold the pillars of leadership, motivation, direction and purpose will benefit from the profits of high productivity.

Employee Motivation

Motivating employees successfully relies mostly on a managerial philosophy than applying a technique (Gilmeanu, 2015). Some the various ways that Managers can motivate employees include: giving them responsibility and the authority to make basic decisions, encouraging them to be creative and innovative, creating a positive culture, regular feedback or a thank you and recognizing employees for accomplishments, and providing excellent customer services (Gilmeanu, 2015). Vlacsekova and Mura (2017) explored the roles of small and medium enterprises in the economic developments. The purpose of the study was to obtain a better understanding of employee motivation issues. A personal information form and the motivation factors questionnaire were used to collect data collection tools. Vlacsekova and Mura found that motivation is very individual, and managers have a hard task motivating their employees. Vlacsekova and Mura concluded that employees are more motivated by intrinsic factors rather than extrinsic factors and that what motivates one employee will not necessarily motivate the other. There are several major theories that provide an understanding of employee motivation: motive and needs, expectancy theory, equity theory, goal setting, cognitive evaluation theory, work design, and reinforcement theory (Lee & Raschke, 2016). In summary, Table 2 outlines various motivational theories and principles.

Table 2

Motivational Theories

Theory	Theorist	Principle
Equity and justice	Adams, 1963	Employees strive for equity between themselves and other employees.
Cognitive evaluation	Deci, 1971	External elements affect intrinsic needs, intrinsic rewards and satisfaction.
Work design	Hackman and Oldham, 1976	Job characteristics: skill variety, task identity, task significance, feedback, and autonomy.
Goal setting	Locke and Latham, 1990	Specific and difficult goals consistently lead to better performance.
Motives and needs	Maslow, 1943	Hierarchy of needs: psychological, safety, social, ego, self-actualizing.
Reinforcement	Skinner, 1953	Managers should positively reinforce employee behaviors that lead to positive outcomes.
Expectancy	Vroom, 1964	Work effort leads to performance and rewards.

Note. Adapted from "Understanding employee motivation and organizational performance: Arguments for a set-theoretic approach," by Lee, M. T., and Raschke, R. L. (2016). *Journal of Innovation & Knowledge*, *1*, 162-169.

Rahman, et al. (2015) asserted that the effectiveness of rewards in influencing employee performance is critical because it affects the achievement of organizational goals. Rahman et al., maintained that rewards that induce extrinsic motivation among individuals are termed as *extrinsic rewards*. These rewards include financial incentives such as bonus and incentive pay, and nonfinancial incentives such as recognition and appreciation, as well as better career prospects such as promotion opportunities in the future (Rahman et al., 2015). In comparison, Kahn (1990) argued that rewards and recognition should influence meaningfulness because they represent returns on the investment of time and effort of an individual in their work.

Transition

In Section 1, I introduced the subject of leadership and how the various styles of leadership affect employee engagement. I included a brief discussion of the general and specific business problem, the nature of the study, and the conceptual framework of the study. Section 1 concluded with a review of the literature which provided information on various constructs and attributes regarding leadership styles, organizational culture, engaged and disengaged employees. My objective for Section 2 was to expound the procedures for conducting my qualitative single case study. In Section 2, I revisited the purpose statement and discussed (a) the role of the researcher, (b) participants, (c) research method and design, (d) ethical research, (e) data collection, and (f) reliability and validity. In Section 3, I discussed the (a) the finding of the study, (b) application to professional practice, (c) implications for social change, (d) recommendations for action, (e) recommendations for further research, (f) reflections, and (g) conclusions.

Section 2: The Project

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the qualitative single case study is to explore strategies that small business managers use to maintain an engaged work force. The targeted population included four small business managers from the same organization within Fairfax County Virginia who have been successful in developing and implementing employee engagement strategies. The results from this study may lead to positive social change by influencing employees to have a healthier attitude at work, a better sense of work life balance, and a pride in belonging. Understanding the contribution of an engaging workforce, may enable organizations to improve performance and profits for catalyzing monetary and nonmonetary contributions benefiting communities.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, my role in the data collection process included asking relevant questions, being a good listener, and having a firm grasp of the issues being studied. Regarding data collection, Yin (2014) recommended six types of information to collect: documents, archival records, interview, direct observations, participant observation, and physical artifacts. My connection with the topic stems from working in both employee and senior leader capacities. I reside near the location of the study, which poses a geographical connection to location of the study. As a researcher, I accepted full responsibility for upholding the ethical principles and guidelines for protecting human subject as outlined in the Belmont Report 1979. Yin (2014) maintained that a good researcher will strive for the highest ethical standards while doing research. As the researcher, I am obligated to mitigate my personal views that may create any form of bias during this study. I mitigated bias by consolidating the data based upon the participants' responses to the interview questions and verifying the validity of the responses through member checking. Member checking is a method of returning an interview or analyzed data to a participant for accuracy (Birt et al., 2016). I used an interview protocol (Appendix) to conduct the interview. The interview protocol contains eight interview questions, a "wrap-up" script to thank the participant, and a follow-up script to schedule the participants' member checking interview.

Participants

Smith and Chudleigh (2015) maintained that recruiting participants with the required experience is central to achieving the purposes of studies. The eligibility criteria for selecting participants in the study included managers who have been successful in developing and implementing employee engagement strategies. Gelling (2010) maintained that before a researcher can move on from planning to approaching participants and collecting data, he or she must obtain research ethics and governance approvals to access the research site or the data. I gained access to the participants after approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). I introduced myself to the owner of the business and members of his staff. I explained the purpose of the study, the eligibility criteria for participating in the study, and the process for withdrawing which can occur at any time during the study.

The owner and members of the staff met the criteria and agreed to participate, I gave each participant a copy of the consent form and coordinated a date and time to conduct the interviews. According to the research ethics committee, participants should be able to consent freely to participate in the research and have an adequate understanding of what the research will involve (Gelling, 2015). I established a working relationship with each participant by encouraging them to communicate with me via email or phone throughout the course of the study. Prior to the interviews, I contacted each participant and addressed any concerns regarding the purpose of the study, the interview date and time.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

Qualitative methodology refers to descriptive data, written or spoken words, and observable behaviors (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2015). Qualitative research spans disciplines compromise diverse theoretical perspectives, and methods for discovery (Hesse-Biber, 2016). As the researcher, using a qualitative methodology enables the exploration of participants' experiences through open-ended interview questions and direct observations. Jervis and Drake (2014) asserted that given the open-ended nature of qualitative study, new ideas can be fully explored and discussed outside of the rigid framework that exist in quantitative studies. In quantitative research, researchers use mathematical methods to analyze and collect data (Ludwig & Johnston, 2016). The quantitative research method was not appropriate because my study will not focus on numerical data for examining variables' relationships or differences. Using a mixed methods approach requires researchers to combine quantitative and qualitative research methods in the same study (Halcomb & Hickman, 2015). The complexities of using both qualitative and quantitative methods were beyond the scope of my research intent.

Research Design

In qualitative research, various strategies of inquiry exist, case study, phenomenon, and ethnography. I used a single case study for my research. Using a single case study allows the researcher to investigate a contemporary phenomenon in depth, and in its real-world context (Yin, 2014). Therefore, the single case study was appropriate for exploring an organization's business managers' experiences regarding developing and implementing strategies to engage their employees. In phenomenology, researchers focus on how humans experience a phenomenon, and how people construct meaning and understanding of their lived experiences (Hepworth, Gruewald, & Walton, 2014). Since I was seeking how to engage people, phenomenology was not the most suitable design for my study. In ethnography, to explore a group's culture, researchers observe the activities of the cultural group under investigation (Zou et al., 2014). Since my study is not about exploring groups' cultural activities, ethnography was not the appropriate design for my study.

Population and Sampling

The population for this qualitative case study comprises small business managers who have been successful in developing and implementing employee engagement strategies based in Fairfax County Virginia. Sampling is an important component of qualitative research design (Robinson, 2014). I used nonrandom purposeful sampling to gain in-depth knowledge of the research problem. Palinkas et al. (2015) maintained that purpose sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest. The number of participants comprised the following individuals: the CEO of the company, and three managers. Robinson (2014) noted that the size of a sample for a qualitative project is influenced by both theoretical and practical considerations. Cleary, Horsfall, and Hayter (2014) argued that a small number of well-selected homogeneous interviewees with adequate exposure to, or experience of the phenomenon can produce highly relevant information for analysis. In comparison, Tavakol and Sandars (2014) stated that the sample size in qualitative studies is usually small and nonrandom, with an intention of obtaining a rich description of the phenomenon of interest.

With regards to data saturation, Morse (2015) defined saturation as the building of rich data within the process of inquiry by attending to scope and replication. Gentles et al. (2015) described data saturation as a point of informational redundancy where additional data collection contributes little or nothing new to the study. I confirmed data saturation by ensuring that the sample was (a) adequate, large enough for replication to occur, and (b) no new information or themes were observed from additional data. The criteria for selecting the participants were limited to small business managers who have been successful in developing and implementing employee engagement strategies and board topic knowledge. Prior to commencing the interviews, I introduced the purpose of the study, the informed consent form, and set the stage of the interview by offering the participants a beverage, coffee or bottled water.

Ethical Research

The informed consent process upholds the basic ethical principle of autonomy in human research (Sil & Das, 2017). I used the informed consent form to explain the purpose of my study, and to obtain voluntary consent and signature from the participants in accordance with Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements. The purpose of the institutional review board is to protect human subjects by weighing any possible harm against any benefit (Connelly, 2014). As the researcher, it is my duty to uphold the ethical standards noted by the IRB and U.S. federal regulations. Participants were informed that they can withdraw from the process at any time. The participants may withdraw by contacting me via email notification or telephone call. To emphasize my appreciation for participating in the study, each participant received a gift certificate placed inside a thank you card at the end of the interview. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, each participant received an alphanumeric code (P1, P2, P3, and P4) to safeguard the participants' confidentiality. Morse and Coulehan (2015) maintained that protecting the privacy of study participants is a core tenet of research ethics. I will maintain the data I collected during the interviews on a USB device, labeled by (day, month, and year) and secure the data in a locked safe in my home office for 5 years. I will destroy the USB device and audio recording after 5 years. The final doctoral manuscript includes the Walden IRB approval number (07-03-18-0510315).

Data Collection Instruments

As the research, I served as the primary data collection instrument. I used face-to-face, semistructured interviews as a means of collecting data. McIntosh et al. (2015)

noted that the semistructured interview is designed to ascertain subjective responses from persons regarding a situation or phenomenon they have experienced. Semistructured interviews provide the opportunity for participants to describe a situation according to their own words (Tavakol & Sandars, 2014). I asked each participant eight open-ended questions regarding strategies to develop and maintain an engaged work force. As an additional means for assuring the validity of the interview data, I audiotaped each interview with permission from the participants and reflected upon hand-written notes. I used member checking to ensure an accurate presentation of the participants' experiences. The interview protocol is in appendix (A).

Data Collection Technique

The data collection technique that I used for this qualitative single case study is the interview. Yin (2014) maintained that one of the most important sources of case study evidence is the interview. Before the interview, I set the stage by welcoming the participant to the study, followed by a brief explanation of the consent form. In addition to the one-on-one interview, I used interview notes, member checking, and review of company documents to collect data. I explained the purpose of the study, the amount of time that I needed to complete the interview and answer any questions or concerns. Upon verbal consent from the participant, I used an audio-recording device to provide a more accurate rendition of the interview. Malagon-Maldonado (2014) noted that the richest form of data can be gained from transcribing verbatim. There are several advantages and disadvantages to using the interview as a data collection technique. Advantages of using interviews include (a) targeted, focuses directly on case study topics, (b) insightful, provide explanations as well as personal views, perceptions, attitudes, and meaning (Yin, 2014). Disadvantages of interviews include potential (a) bias due to poor articulated questions, (b) response bias, (c) inaccuracies due to poor recall, and (d) reflexivity, the interviewee gives what the interviewer wants to hear (Yin, 2014). The need to conduct a pilot study after IRB approval was not necessary. Therefore, after the interview I scheduled a second meeting with each participant to conduct member checking to ensure an accurate presentation of the participants' experiences.

Data Organization Technique

DeMassis and Kotlar (2014) maintained that a useful way to organize data collected through multiple sources is the creation of a case study database. Using a case study database can increases the reliability of the research because it enables the researcher to track and organize data sources (DeMassis & Kotlar, 2014). As the researcher, the ability to organize, maintain, and retrieve data is a vital part of conducting a study. Malagon-Maldonado (2014) maintained that through organization and management of the data from interviews, fieldnotes, and memos, the research brings structure and order. The data collected from the participants during the interviews was audio recorded and transcribed. Audio recordings and transcriptions were coded and cataloged by date and time group for follow-up member checking, quick retrieval, or disposition. The data I collected during the interviews will be maintained on a USB device, labeled by (day, month, and year) and secured in a locked safe in my home office for 5 years. I will destroy the USB device and audio recording after 5 years.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is an interactive activity and requires moving to and from the data collection to the analysis and perhaps refining, the questions asked (Maglagon-Maldonado, 2014). The data that I manually analyzed included participant interviews, interview notes, and company documentation. I employed Yin's five-phased cycle to analyze the data: (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting, and (e) concluding (Yin, 2015). I compiled the participants' responses, interview notes, company documents, and member checking. I disassembled the data from the participants, reassemble and analyze the data for themes. I imported Word documents into NVivo, disassembled, reassembled, and interpreted the data for themes.

With regards to triangulation, Yin (2014) defined triangulation as the convergence of data collected from different sources, to determine the consistency of a finding. Carter et al. (2014) noted that triangulation has been viewed as a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the convergence of information of different types from different sources. Therefore, since I was collecting and analyzing data from multiple participants, interview notes, and company documentation, I also used methodological triangulation as a data analysis process. Employing methodological triangulation enables the researcher to use multiple methods of data collection to gain, and articulate, a comprehensive view of the phenomenon (Cope, 2014).

Castleberry (2014) asserted that using NVivo enables researchers to: collect data, organize, and analyze varied data types. DeMassis and Kotlar (2014) concluded that NVivo supports researchers in systematically coding and organizing large amounts of data, developing categories, tracing links between concepts, and understanding relationships among categories. Therefore, I used NVivo software for revealing key themes regarding topics in the literature review. I focused on key themes by organizing the collected data into categories that may link to topics in the literature review. The key categories included leadership, leadership styles, employee engagement, disengaged employees, and employee motivation.

Reliability and Validity

Grossoehme (2014) maintained that reliability refers to the extent to which the results are repeatable, whereas validity refers to whether the conclusion truly portrays the phenomena. Leung (2015) maintained that assuring validity in qualitative research requires defining and using appropriate tools, processes, and data. Grossoehme (2014) noted that using member checking should enhance validity. Both reliability and validity are embedded in trustworthiness, and supplemental means for achieving trustworthiness are through demonstrating a study's credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Reliability

Dependability is another criterion that is used to evaluate trustworthiness of qualitative studies' findings (Tavakol & Sandars, 2014). Reliability is achieved by thoroughly describing the processes employed for assuring the consistency and repeatability of the research procedures used in a case study (Yin, 2014). I used member checking to address the dependability of data that I obtain from the participants' responses. The purpose of member checking is to ensure dependability and credibility of qualitative studies (Hadi & Closs, 2016). In addition, I used reflective journals and transcripts to maintain consistency of the data collection, data organization, and data analysis process.

Validity

Credibility is enhanced by the researcher describing his or her experiences as a researcher and verifying the researcher's findings with the participants (Cope, 2014). I used member checking and methodological triangulation to assure credibility of the study. Member checking refers to giving the transcribed interview back to the participant to confirm, obtain additional information, or for modifications (Morse, 2015). Methodological triangulation is a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources and types of data (Carter et al., 2014).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts or settings with other respondents (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Doughty Horn et al. (2016) stated that transferability refers to how useful the information gained will be to the audience for which it was intended. To enable others' determination of transferability, I provided a clear and detailed description of the setting, the selection and characteristics of the participants, and the key design processes.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the researcher's ability to demonstrate that the data represent the participants' responses and not the researcher's biases or viewpoints (Cope, 2014). I used an audit trail to establish confirmability of the research findings. I mitigated any bias that occurs through member checking. Member checking involves validation of data with study participants (Hadi & Closs, 2016).

Data Saturation

Tavakol and Sandars (2014) found that data saturation is reached when no new information is being uncovered and redundancy is achieved. Gentles et al. (2015) described data saturation as a point of informational redundancy where additional data collection contributes little or nothing new to the study. Therefore, I confirmed data saturation by ensuring no new information or themes are observed from each of the data types and sources.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I revisited the purpose statement, and discussed (a) the role of the researcher, (b) participants, (c) research method and design, (d) population and sampling, (e) ethical research, (f) data collection instruments, (g) data collection techniques, (h) data organization techniques, (i) data analysis, and (j) reliability and validity. Section 3 includes the presentation of the findings, the application to professional practice, the implications for social change, the recommendations on how the results of the study might be disseminated for further research, and the conclusion.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of the qualitative single case study was to explore strategies that small business managers use to maintain an engaged work force. I conducted semistructed interviews with four small business managers from the same organization within Fairfax County Virginia. The interviews took place in a private conference room where the participants were able to feel comfortable and speak freely without interruption. I allocated 30 minutes for each interview; however, each interview lasted no longer than 25 minutes. I used an interview protocol (Appendix) and during the semistructed interviews; I asked each participant the same eight open ended questions in verbatim. I used an audio recorder, hand-written notes, company documentation, and member checking to obtain and verify the data for addressing this study's research question.

At the end of the interview, I scheduled a follow-up meeting with each participant to conduct member checking to verify the accuracy of the data. I used email correspondence to conduct member checking for participants that were unable too physically attend a follow-up meeting. I transcribed the data from the audio recordings and conducted a manual analysis of the data as described in Section 2. I compiled the interview data and member checking and transferred the data into a Microsoft Word document. I imported the Word document into NVivo 11; I disassembled, reassembled, and interrupted the data to collect answers to the overarching research question.

Presentation of the Findings

I conducted a qualitative single case study to address the research question: What strategies do small business managers of privately-owned companies use to maintain an engaged work force? I conducted face-to-face semistructured interviews with four small business managers from the same organization within Fairfax County Virginia who have been successful in developing and implementing employee engagement strategies. I asked each participant the same eight open-ended questions regarding strategies to develop and maintain an engaged work force. As an additional means for assuring the validity of the interview data, I audiotaped each interview with permission from the participants and reflected upon hand-written notes. I used member checking to ensure an accurate representation of the participants' experiences. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, each participant received an alphanumeric code (P1, P2, P3, and P4) to safeguard the participants' confidentiality.

I used Yin's five-phased cycle to compile, disassemble, reassemble, interpret, and analyze the data. I compiled the participants' responses, interview notes, company documents, and member checking to ensure the dependability of data that I obtained from the participants' responses. Malagon-Maldonado (2014) maintained that through organization and management of the data from interviews, fieldnotes, and memos, the researcher achieves structure and order. Therefore, as the researcher, the ability to organize, maintain, and retrieve data is a vital part of conducting a study. I imported the data into NVivo 11, compiled, disassembled, reassembled, and interpreted the data to identify themes. Two major themes emerged as strategies to engage employees in the workplace. The first theme involved creating and sustaining a cohesive organizational environment to catalyze employee engagement. The second theme involved strategies for effective communications to improve employee engagement.

Theme 1: Creating and Sustaining a Cohesive Engaging Organizational Environment

Employees who feel comfortable about their working environment are more likely to work effectively and enjoy the working process as compared to those who feel uncomfortable (Khuong & LeVu, 2014). In regard to a cohesive organizational environment, P4 indicated that a cohesive organization environment is one that has clear objectives, and a fair amount of latitude for how to achieve those objectives. In relationship to the culture of an organization. P1 indicated that an engaging environment is cohesive, respectable, productive, and fosters one's desire to work. An engaged workplace encourages commitment, energy and productivity from all those involved to help improve business performance (Harshitha, 2015). Furthermore, an engaged workplace includes trust and support from the managers, and a sense of safety in the environment (Hollis, 2015). In regard to productivity and morale, P1 emphasized the importance of explaining self-improvement opportunities to mitigate employee shortfalls. In addition, P2 placed emphasis on empowerment, indicating that empowerment is an essential part of employee engagement. Career development, opportunities for personal development, leadership, clarity of company values, and empowerment are principal factors regarding employee engagement (Gupta, 2015). P4 placed emphasis on employee engagement strategies outside of the organizational environment. P4 indicated that team building and group activities outside of the organization may lead to positive change. The findings that emerged in this theme were consistent with the body of knowledge in the literature review. In addition, the themes in Table 3 represent strategies that could be used to create an engaging work environment.

Table 3

Organizational Environment

Theme	*n*	% of frequency of occurrence
Atmosphere	4	19.05%
Effort	5	23.81%
Team work	6	28.57%
Structure	6	28.57%

Note: n = frequency

Theme 2: Ensuring Effective Communications

According to Mishra, Boynton, and Mishra (2014), in both theory and practice, internal communications are critical to building relationships with employees. Reed (2017) noted that the most powerful component of leadership communication is listening to employees. Ruben and Gigliotti maintained that beyond the oral and written messages, nonverbal and material elements are also potentially significant elements of the communications environment. Regarding communications, P4 indicated that it is important that you deliver clear objectives, provide a clear understanding of what is expected of each employee, with a fair amount of latitude for how to achieve that objective. P3 emphasized the importance of communicating explaining that “It is important that you try to bring out the positive in every person you meet, to be successful everyone needs to communicate and collectively work together.” Gupta (2015) identified five strategies for improving employee engagement: encourage the employees’ involvement in companywide initiatives, encourage creativity and innovation, encourage open communications, provide educational opportunities, and share information. P2 focused on listening, indicating that listening is an important element regarding effective communications; some employees develop a sense of frustration when they feel as though no one is listening to their concerns. Hence, the most powerful component of leadership communications is listening to employees (Reed, 2017).

The findings that emerged within this theme were consistent with the body of knowledge in the literature review. In addition, the themes in Table 4 represent strategies that mangers could use to establish effective communications, essentially creating an engaging work force. Internal communications between managers and employees should enhance trust and lead to greater employee engagement within the company (Mishra, Boynton & Mishra, 2014). The participants were confident with their ability to manage and engage employees. The participants understood the purpose of fostering a cohesive work environment, an environment that welcomes flexibility, work life balance, comradery, and change.

Table 4

Effective Communications

Theme	*n*	% of frequency of occurrence
Change	4	26.67%
Support	5	33.33%
Engage	6	40.00%

Note: n = frequency

The Relevancy to the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this study was the leader-member exchange theory. Leader-member exchange is related to performance, organizational commitment, job climate, innovation, organizational citizenship behavior, empowerment, procedural and distributive justice, and career progress (Gran & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The themes that emerged in the study align with various components of employee engagement and the conceptual framework. Therefore, the leader-member exchange theory was appropriate to this study of employee engagement strategies by illuminating the importance of establishing a stable relationship between leaders and their subordinates. The ability to lead, manage, and create an engaging work environment centered on effective communications is essential to leader-member exchange. The leader-member exchange theory addresses leadership as a process centered on the quality of the interactions between leaders and followers (Northouse, 2013).

Applications to Professional Practice

The findings in this study are applicable to employee engagement practices. The aim of the study was to explore the different strategies small business manager could use to engage employees in the work force. Engaged employees work to improve the overall performance of the organization and uphold its values (Taneja, Sewell, & Odom, 2015). To encourage employee engagement, organizations must focus on cultivating a work environment supportive of employees, keeping them motivated and positive about their jobs and the organization (Storm et al., 2014). Reed (2017) maintained that the most powerful component of leadership communication is listening to employees. In both theory and practice, the quality of internal communications is critical to building relationships with employees. Furthermore, internal communications between managers and employees should enhance trust and lead to greater employee engagement within the company (Mishra et al., 2014)

Managers who foster a sustainable organizational environment and effective communications might benefit from these employee engagement strategies once implemented into the work force. However, the tangible results of integrating new employee engagement practices may take a period before fruition. Nevertheless, as a manager, the opportunity to effect change in an organization is immediate gratification for leaders, employees. Furthermore, catalyzing employee engagement is expected to (a) improve performance and productivity for providing a competitive edge, (b) mitigate turnover and improve morale, and (c) increase customer satisfaction and improve organizations' bottom lines (Rao, 2017). The findings from this study augment the existing body of knowledge regarding strategies on how to engage employees to improve organizations' performance.

Implications for Social Change

The results of this study could contribute to social change by connecting managers from various organizations within the community to new strategies for engaging employees in the work place. Kahn (1990) maintained that the more employees are enthusiastic about their work, the more they will be motivated and engaged in meeting their organizations' goals. Furthermore, employees who are personally engaged cognitively and emotionally are more satisfied, and they are more productive. In addition, Taneja et al. (2015) found that engaged employees are more committed to their work and feel connected to the success of their organizations and are more likely to believe in their organizations' values, mission, and vision. The contributions to positive social change include encouraging employees to having a healthier attitude at work, having a better sense of work-life balance, and having pride in belonging. Understanding the contribution of an engaging workforce, may enable organizations to improve performance and profits for catalyzing monetary and nonmonetary contributions benefiting communities.

Recommendations for Action

By reviewing the findings from this study, managers should understand the need for developing and fostering a cooperative and productive business atmosphere. Organizations need to implement various forms of organizational leadership training at all levels to foster employee engagement, increase production. I recommend that leadership communicate to their subordinates the full scope of the overall mission and vision of the organization as a strategy to effect mutual beneficial change. Managers must focus their attention on how well their subordinates understand the overarching goals of the mission and vision. Through implementing and continuously reinforcing such communications, employees are more likely motivated to accept greater responsibility in reaching the performance goals. Cardus (2013) maintained that there are five levers that can increase employee engagement: (a) competent managers, (b) broad goals that are established within the proper context, (c) objective measures of progress and regress, (d) necessary resources to get the job done, and (e) sufficient autonomy to do their best work.

I recommend that organizational leaders and managers continue to further their communication skills. Such leaders' actions can benefit both the leader and follower. The more effective and efficient the communication, the better the employee can help meet the stated mission and vision which enhance a sense of moral, teamwork, and a common bond. Harshitha (2015) maintained that an engaged workplace encourages commitment, energy and productivity to help improve business performance.

Recommendations for Further Research

I recommend using the findings from this study to further research on employee engagement and for creating a work environment that brings out the best in talented employees. I recommend additional research on how communications between a manager and employees improve the economic activity of an organization. In addition, I encourage further research on examining the relationship between transformative and transactional leadership, and how each style affects employee engagement. Furthermore, I recommend a study for examining the quantitative relationship between government employee engagement strategies, and the resultant level of employee engagement. Conducting research on these types of studies may significantly contribute to the body of scholarly literature on employee engagement.

Reflections

The Doctor of Business Administration program was an invaluable learning experience. I can attest that I will miss the daily interactions with my peers and committee members. The constant sharing of lessons learned from individual experiences has been phenomenal. In the beginning, when I took the helm of responsibility for my study, I charged myself to remain disciplined and committed to the cause. To reach my destination required personal sacrifice, motivation, and self-determination. I give thanks to God, for blessing me with the strength and wisdom to see the benefits from completing this study. Reflecting upon the difficult days and endless nights, my personal reviews regarding employee engagement remain upper most in my mind. However, throughout the course of this DBA Doctoral study I contained my personal perspectives on the topic and attempted to assure objective findings through using an interview protocol approved by my committee and through employing member checking.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies that small business managers of a privately-owned company use to obtain and maintain an engaged work force. I conducted face-to-face semistructured interviews with four small business managers from the same organization. I asked each participant the same eight open ended questions. I used an audio recorder, hand-written notes, company documentation, and member checking to obtain the data needed for addressing this study's research question. As an additional means for assuring the validity of the interview data, I audiotaped each interview with permission from the participants and reflected upon hand-written notes. I used member checking to ensure an accurate presentation of the participants' experiences. I confirmed data saturation by ensuring that the sample was (a) adequate, large enough for replication to occur, and (b) no new information or themes were observed in additional data. I used Yin's five-phased cycle to compile, disassemble, reassemble, interpret, and analyze the data to develop and explore key themes.

At the conclusion of the analysis, the following two themes became evident: creating and sustaining a cohesive engaging organizational environment and ensuring effective communications. The findings in this qualitative single case study are consistent with the conceptual framework, leader member exchange, and the body of knowledge noted in the literature review. The findings of the study clearly suggest that a cohesive work environment and effective communication between leaders and followers could improve (a) employee performance, (b) productivity, (c) moral, and (d) organizations' bottom lines.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Interview Protocol</td></tr>
<tr><td>What I will do</td><td>What I will say</td></tr>
<tr><td>Introduce the interview and set the stage—often over a meal or coffee</td><td>Thank you for participating in my study, I would to give you a summary of the purpose of study and answer any questions that you may have at this time.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="8">Watch for non-verbal cues.
Paraphrase as needed.
Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in-depth.</td><td>1. What do you consider as an engaging work environment?</td></tr>
<tr><td>2. What strategies do you use to engage your employees?</td></tr>
<tr><td>3. What are your responsibilities with regard to engaging your employees?</td></tr>
<tr><td>4. Based upon your experiences, what are some of the factors of employee engagement that impact your employees?</td></tr>
<tr><td>5. How would you describe the relationship between organizational performance and employee engagement?</td></tr>
<tr><td>6. What, if any, barriers have you experienced with regard to implementing the strategies for engaging your employees?</td></tr>
<tr><td>7. How have you addressed the barriers?</td></tr>
<tr><td>8. What additional information would you like to share on this topic?</td></tr>
<tr><td>Wrap up interview thanking participant</td><td>I would like to thank you for your time, and your participation. Do you have any questions for me at this time?</td></tr>
<tr><td>Follow-up member checking interview</td><td>I would like to take this opportunity to invite you to a follow-up interview. The purpose of the interview is to conduct member checking as stated in the consent form.</td></tr>
</table>

Follow–up Member Checking Interview	
Introduce follow-up interview and set the stage	Thank you for coming to follow up interview. Before we get started please let me know if you have any questions or concerns at this time.
• Share a copy of the succinct synthesis for each individual question. • Bring in probing questions related to other information that you may have found—note the information must be related so that you are probing and adhering to the IRB approval. • Walk through each question, read the interpretation and ask: • Did I miss anything? Or, what would you like to add?	During this interview, I would like to share a copy of the interview questions and the participant responses.
	Q1). What do you consider as an engaging work environment? R1).
	Q2). What strategies do you use to engage your employees? R2).
	Q3). What are your responsibilities with regard to engaging your employees? R3).
	Q4). Based upon your experiences, what are some of the factors of employee engagement that impact your employees? R4).
	Q5). How would you describe the relationship between organizational performance and employee engagement? R5).
	Q6). What, if any, barriers have you experienced with regard to implementing the strategies for engaging your employees? R6).
	Q7). How have you addressed the barriers? R7).
	Q8). What additional information would you like to share on this topic? R8).