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Exploring Employee Engagement Strategies from the Employee Perspective: A Case Study

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Walden University
2019

Abstract

Exploring Employee Engagement Strategies from the Employee Perspective:

A Case Study

by

Harley R. Barmore

MA/S, Air University, 2012

BA, Northern Arizona University, 2000

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

Walden University

August 2019

Abstract

Small businesses, which are important to the success of local communities, continue to fail at a much higher rate than their larger counterparts. Employee disengagement contributes to small businesses failure and is often precipitated by a misalignment of leader intent and employee perception of engagement strategies. The purpose of this case study, grounded in prevailing engagement theories, was to explore the alignment of employee perceptions to leaders' engagement strategies. Research questions elicited employee perceptions of leader engagement strategies and how these perceptions influenced their attitudes toward work. Data were collected from employees and the owner of a small Midwestern, privately owned restaurant totaling 17 participants. A normed climate survey was also administered and determined the congruence with the alignment and areas of misalignment of perceptions. Interview data were coded to identify patterns and emerging themes within the data. Results indicated the both the workers and leader were perfectly aligned on safeguarding the reputation of the business. However, some misalignment was identified and demonstrated by displays of avoidant behaviors and lackadaisical work. The disengaged employees felt they had limited opportunities to advance. Where misalignments arose, employees tended to look to internal motivators such as personal pride of work and internal work ethic often served to overcome the misalignments. Engagement strategies should be employed to continually assess opportunities for alignment to minimize disengagement. Promoting positive employee feelings of value to the organization though alignment can help mitigate dangerous side effects of disengagement and help reduce small business failures.

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Dedication

I dedicate this research to my amazing children, Cota and Jaken. Throughout unbelievable military and academic careers, I have earned some really cool titles. By far, the greatest title I will ever have is *Dad*. All the things I do are for you and our family. I love you both.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Employee engagement is a powerful aspect of business success and employee empowerment (Simpson, 2009). Small businesses are important to the success of local communities, creating more than 63% of all new job growth (Hess & Cottrell, 2016). Regardless, small businesses continue to fail at a much higher rate than their larger counterparts (Kennedy & Benson, 2016). The U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor and Statistics (2016) Business Employment Dynamics data shows that just 69% of small businesses continue to operate beyond 2 years with only 51% surviving to the 5-year point. This higher failure rate can be attributed partially to individual and organizational antecedents that effect employee engagement at work (Kennedy & Benson, 2016; Simpson, 2009). As important to local communities as small businesses are, the susceptibility small businesses have to counterproductive work behaviors resulting from disengaged employees cannot be overstated (Hess & Cottrell, 2016; Kennedy & Benson, 2016; Simpson, 2009). My goal for this study was to examine potential employee engagement strategies as a result of management perspectives being fine-tuned using employee perspective. I used the adaptation of a climate survey to triangulate trends in the findings.

My intent for this study was to examine the phenomenon of employee engagement within the construct of a small business in the American Midwest. Evaluating management engagement strategies against employee perception of those strategies revealed how a match or mismatch of those strategies can directly affect employee engagement.

Employee engagement emerged from Kahn's (1990) theory of engagement and disengagement. Kahn theorized that employees' levels of organizational commitment, involvement, and availability speak to both the leadership and organizational climate of a business entity. Understanding the phenomenon of employee engagement and how an organizational message could influence employee perceptions of engagement, could also influence an organization's economic outcomes or even provide an organizational advantage through aspects of improved employee creativity and motivation, just to name a few benefits (Georgiades, 2015; Turner, 2017).

I conducted an exploratory case study to examine the role that employee engagement plays in small business effectiveness and success. I aimed to narrow the focus of employee perspective to examine how small business owners could tune their perspectives or to foster better alignment with how employees perceive the engagement strategies.

The remaining sections of this chapter include the problem statement, purpose statement, research questions and hypotheses, nature of the study, theoretical foundation as well as the theoretical and conceptual framework for the study. This chapter also includes the significance of the study, significance, significance to theory, and the potential of the study to engage positive social change.

Background of the Study

Employee engagement is an important index of organizational climate and is directly linked to organizational outcomes (Saks & Gruman, 2014; Simpson, 2009). Engagement, demonstrated by employee enthusiasm and commitment, is predicated on

employee needs and security being met (Jena & Goswami, 2014). There is a highly likely possibility that leaders could preempt ineffective engagement strategies that may lead to negative work by aligning engagement strategies with employee perceptions. Such strategies would positively influence the organizational climate and employee behaviors that promote a culture of fairness and mindfulness (Long & Christian, 2015). According to Mazzei, Flynn, and Haynie (2016), the minimum for managers and leaders is no longer to hire the correct people and get out of the way; modern leaders need to develop their employees through conceptual understanding and practices and policies that encourage positive and productive employee behaviors (Mazzei et al., 2016). Given this knowledge, insights into employee engagement strategies and employee perceptions of those strategies should provide significant insights into increasing employee and organizational performance (Kurtessis et al., 2017). The added benefit comes with improved economic outcomes by leveraging a competitive advantage over other businesses in similar situations (Anitha, 2014).

The literature surrounding the phenomenon of employee engagement revolved around the concepts of resource availability in the work environment, the job demands placed on employees in the work environment, and employee motivation (Anthony-McMann, Ellinger, Astakhova, & Halbesleben, 2017; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Madden & Bailey, 2017). Employee motivation includes job satisfaction, involvement in work tasks, organizational commitment, and employee physical and mental health (Madden & Bailey, 2017).

Engaged employees bring many positive assets and attributes to their organizations that positively affect organizational climate as well as bring substantial contributions to organizational efficiency and effectiveness (Anthony-McMann et al., 2017; Madden & Bailey, 2017). Disengaged employees tend to demonstrate less productivity and tend to participate in counterproductive work behaviors. Counterproductive work behaviors run across a spectrum from tardiness to lack of reliability all the way up to the extremes of theft and violence (Holtz & Harold, 2013; Whelpley & McDaniel, 2016). Such information may help leaders develop a better understanding of the perception of actual strategies and if there is a need for an alignment between perception and actual organizational climate. Understanding of this alignment and misalignment can help leaders preempt ineffective engagement strategies based on employee perceptions.

Problem Statement

Current estimates reveal that as much as 70% of the modern workforce in the United States is disengaged (Rastogi, Pati, Krishnan, & Krishnan, 2018). Employees who are disengaged introduce monetary costs to an organization due to accidents, injuries, and spoiled organizational reputation (Hollis, 2015), as well as intrinsic costs associated with employees not embracing work roles or employees not finding meaningful purpose in accomplishment of work tasks (Byrne, 2015). As Bouckenooghe, Raja, and Abbas (2014), as well as Valentine (2014) demonstrated, employee perceptions of organizational variables, like climate, directly impact employee engagement or disengagement tendencies. Examining an organization's orientation to engagement

strategies combined with an examination of employee emotional perceptions of their organization, Rastogi et al. (2018) demonstrated a need for awareness of both organizational climate as well as employee perceptions of that organizational climate in order to improve overall levels of employee engagement. The general problem is that there can be a mismatch between a leader's engagement strategy intent and employees' perception of that strategy intent within small businesses (Kurtessis et al., 2017). This mismatch may negatively affect employee work performance and may be predictive of certain organizational climate issues that speak to the level of employee engagement commitment. The specific problem is that small business leaders may not consider seeking feedback on engagement strategies to assess their effectiveness until toxic work behavior becomes problematic (Volery, Mueller, & von Siemens, 2015).

A large portion of the work force is not engaged. Disengagement can be costly and dangerous. Employee perceptions of climate link to engagement and disengagement. Understanding the gap between climate factors that lead to engagement and how employees perceive organizational engagement strategies, becomes a bridge that could prove critical to promoting engagement behaviors that reduce or eliminate the costly and dangerous side effects of disengagement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to explore the alignment or misalignment of employee perceptions of, and the leader's intent of, engagement strategies. The exploration occurred from the viewpoint of the employees of a small, Midwest business. My intent for this study was to uncover employees' perceptions of the

strategies and how consistent they were with the intent of the business owner. I compared the results from face-to-face interviews to the results of a climate survey. I used the climate survey to complete data triangulation, and I administered the survey to evaluate the climate of the organization in order to determine if the current organizational climate is consistent with the match or mismatch of employee perceptions and engagement.

Research Questions

I employed an exploratory case study design for this research. The research questions reflected both the need to gage leader intent as well as capture employee perception of that intent. I chose the research question to reflect the intent to collect pertinent data and extract meaning from the interview process, triangulated with the subsequent climate survey. The selected research questions are as follows:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): How do the employees' perceptions of the business's engagement strategy compare with the leader's engagement strategies intent?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How do these employee perceptions influence employee attitudes toward work performance?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was based on using Kahn's (1990) theory of employee engagement as a lens. Kahn (1990) first described employee engagement as the ability to harness employee's own physical, emotional, and cognitive attributes to achieve the leader's vision and organizational goals. Kahn (1990) cited three major psychological conditions where engagement is defined, naming these areas

meaningfulness, safety, and availability. From Kahn's theory, Rothbard (2001) elaborated on the psychological state Kahn began describing and stated that employee engagement can also include one's physiological presence in work tasks, where engaged employees are hard to distract and deeply immersed in work when engaged. Kahn's theory (1990) explains causes and barriers to employee engagement and organizational commitment. Employee engagement encompasses other intangible organizational factors that include work relationships, degree of psychological empowerment that is perceived by employees, and an overarching barometer of engagement that can be described as the employee-organizational relationship (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017). Kahn (1990) discovered that engaged employees express themselves on many levels when involved in tasks that they believe are meaningful, have positive purpose, and that are safe. When engaged employees feel that they have the correct assets to complete meaningful tasks, they tend to express themselves on levels emotionally, physically, and cognitively (Kahn, 1990). Conversely, when leaders lead irresponsibly, employee engagement decreases as employee withdraw increases (Kahn, 1990). Using Kahn's (1990) enhanced my exploration of gaps where small business owners in the Midwest can develop strategies to increase employee engagement and overall organizational productivity, efficiency, and business reputation. I used Kahn's (1990) theory to relate to the approach in this study and research question that helped to assess engagement-inducing factors in this case, and elements in the case's organizational climate that lead to engagement or disengagement in the employees.

For this study I focused on the phenomenon of employee engagement using a conceptual framework based on Kahn's (1990) theory of personal engagement at work, specifically Kahn's pillars of meaningfulness and purposefulness in the work environment. One of my goals for this study was to examine the phenomenon through the conceptual lensing of organizational climate and employee engagement. Using these elements, one can examine the style in which employees accomplish task performance. Specifically, the attachment and detachment of people from their work roles, which varies, demonstrated in the quality of their work. This was evident in some degree in the level of personal motivation of the employee (Kahn, 1990). Modern leaders need to develop their employees through conceptual understanding and practices and policies that encourage positive and productive employee behaviors, promoting employees to be more present in work tasks (Mazzei et al., 2016). The need for this study was supported by the need for insights into employee engagement strategies and employee perceptions of those strategies; providing significant insights into increasing employee and organizational performance.

Kahn (1990) theorized that employees' levels of organizational commitment, involvement, and availability, link to the organizational climate of a business entity. Kahn's theory has demonstrated links that could be exploited to further the potential for understanding other key small business factors as the theory has been proven that employee engagement links to elements of job satisfaction, organizational outcomes, overall safety, and even turnover (Huang et al., 2016). Additionally, employee engagement is an important index of organizational climate and is directly linked to

certain desired organizational outcomes (Saks & Gruman, 2014; Simpson, 2009). A vast range of other organizational outcomes, like burnout, stress, and even overall job satisfaction, have viable links to the levels of employee engagement within an organization (Anthony-McMann et al., 2017). The key concepts of employee engagement and organizational climate connect with Kahn's (1990) overarching theory of engagement.

By examining employee perception versus leader intent, I discovered how employees approach work tasks and perceived their purpose under the umbrella of employee engagement. My goal was to understand what employee's perceive regarding strategies a small, Midwest business owner used to improve employee engagement through structured interview questions and a climate assessment survey. By first gathering the owner's strategic intent, I then compared it to the qualitative data collected that provided depth and meaning from the employees' perceptions of that intent. Concurrently, I then used the climate survey to see if there were climate factors that predicted the degree of said alignment.

Nature of the Study

Qualitative

The approach for this exploratory case study included three sources of data. The three sources were employee perceptions, leader intent, and a climate survey to assist in triangulation. Interviews were used to explore the employee perceptions of the engagement strategies. A climate survey was indicative of the level of congruence or incongruence of employee perceptions and leader intent of engagement strategies. The

qualitative approach is commonly used to understand the *how* and *why* of a business phenomenon (Silverman, 2016). Based upon the purpose of this study, the exploratory case study research methodology was appropriate to the level of congruence of the engagement strategies and determined if organization climate could be an indicator as to how well the employee perceptions and leader intent aligned. If it was a valid indicator, the climate survey could be a useful tool for managers and leaders to assess the effectiveness of their strategies. Multiple data sources in research can be appropriate when attempting to identify tools leaders can use to assess the effectiveness of their engagement strategies (Graff, 2017), further justifying a case study approach.

Data collection occurred concurrently utilizing face-to-face interviews followed directly by a climate survey. I analyzed the interview data by conducting open coding. I placed the rest of the data in coded groups using categorical construction to find other key words and underlying patterns to create common themes. The responses to the climate survey were used to triangulate the two other sources of data. The survey was conducted at the level of individual employees to analyze the relationship between employee perception scores and data provided by the manager. The population for this study included employees at all levels of a small, Midwest restaurant business that have more than a week of employment at the business.

This was an exploratory case study using three sources of data. These were the employee interview, the manager/leader interviews, and the climate survey. Triangulation of the results added depth to the analysis and interpretation of the data. I used O'Cathain, Murphy, and Nicholl (2010) to help clarify the two research definitions of triangulation

by using two statements; one meaning involving corroboration between two sets of

findings, and one that explains the process by which a researcher studies a problem using

different methods in an attempt to gain a higher resolution of understanding.

Definitions

The subsequent terms are unique to the topic of employee engagement. The

following also provides concise definitions of key concepts and constructs.

Counterproductive behaviors: Is defined as any behavior that runs contrary to

legitimate organizational goals ranging from minor infraction to sabotage and violence

(Whelpley & McDaniel, 2016).

Employee disengagement: Employee disengagement refers to distraction, lack of

interest in work roles, separation from job roles, causing rapid task oversaturation which

leads to a state of mental and physical retreat or defense, characterized by a general lack

of overall interest (Hollis, 2015; Kahn, 1990; Pech & Slade, 2006).

Employee engagement: Employee engagement is the phenomenon where the

employee is involved, energized, enthusiastic, and focused on organizational purpose

(Macey & Schneider, 2008).

Employee engagement strategies: The outcome of deliberate strategies to increase

employee involvement, energy, enthusiasm, and focus toward organizational goals and

increase presence, commitment, and performance in the conduct of job tasks (Bailey,

Madden, Alfes, & Fletcher, 2017).

Organizational climate: Organizational climate is defined as characteristics that influence perception pertaining to policy, process, and practices (Wallace, Butts, Johnson, Stevens, & Smith, 2016).

Small business: According to the U.S. Small Business Administration (2016), as classified under the North American Industry Classification System, a small business is defined as a restaurant the at serves alcohol that nets less than $7.5 million annually in receipts.

Triangulation: Triangulation has two meanings in advanced research. O'Cathain et al. (2010) stated that one meaning involves corroboration between two sets of findings, and the other explains the process by which a researcher studies a problem using different methods in an attempt to gain a higher resolution of understanding. My use of the word *triangulation* in this section will rest with the first definition; the process of corroboration of key data within the three sets of data in this case study.

Assumptions

Assumptions served to frame just how the research problem was viewed and provided the blueprint to how the potential solutions emerged (Wolgemuth, Hicks, & Agosto, 2017). There were three assumptions for this study. My first assumption was that participants would provide truthful responses. While it is impossible to assess truthfulness of each participant, it is possible to arrive at truth, according to Pring (2000), as truth is derived not from an individual response but rather from a consensus of co-constructors (p. 251). My next assumption was that the small business in this study was representative of small businesses within the restaurant industry. This assumption was

required in order to tailor research finding to other similar businesses. My final assumption was that employees start off in a job by wanting to do a good job and fit into the organizational culture. To elaborate, it is through the process of organizational acclimation that employees perceive differing levels of fairness, equality, and organizational justice, or even other unclear or unknown influences that may cause them to change their level of work quality, output, and overall physical and emotional presence. Within the context of this organizational climate, the atmosphere tends to be reflective of employee observations and interpretations of leader behavior and intent (Pareek, 1994).

Scope and Delimitations

Delimitations bind the overall scope of the research as well as define the case's scope and characteristics (Algozzine & Hancock, 2017). I bound the overall scope of this study to a single, Midwest small business in the Greater Omaha area of Eastern Nebraska. This small business was representative of small businesses in this specific geographic region. I focused the analysis of this bounded case research on the perceptions of a sample group of employees in a small business combined with the comparison of management's established employee engagement strategies to determine if there is alignment of the strategy intent and with the employee's perceptions of the strategy. Noble and Smith (2015) stated that doing so made it likely that the results of this study could be transferable to leaders of other small businesses.

Many factors are involved in organizational success. Some of these factors are socioeconomic conditions in the community, federal and state regulations, and natural

disasters. I focused this research study on the aspects of employee and managerial perspectives on employee engagement strategies.

Limitations

Holloway and Galvin (2017) stated that limitations are researcher-identified weaknesses in the underlying research which balances when the researcher spells out these limitations, showing well thought-out preparation going into the research exercise. This study had two limitations. The first limitation was that the sample is not a perfect representation of all small restaurant business in the United States. Instead, the sample represented a single, small business in the American Midwest in the restaurant industry. I also limited this study to regional cultural norms and beliefs that affect employee perceptions of the American Midwest business. I gave care to the process of explaining key terms to respondents, further limitations could have emerged relating to participant honesty and participant inability to conceptualize the concepts involved with the term *engagement*.

Significance of the Study

Significance to Practice

This study provides small business leaders with tools derived from employee perspectives, to fine-tune organizational strategies for success. Implications of this study could help minimize counterproductive work behaviors often caused by a lack of employee engagement. Counterproductive work behaviors contribute to organizational inefficiency and employee harm on many levels and are shown to be mitigatable.

Employee attitudes toward their work contribute to the building of perceptions of fairness and concern on the part of the organizational leaders (Cahill, McNamara, Pitt-Catsouphes, & Valcour, 2015). Organizational procedures, perceived by employees as fair, contribute to perceived support of employees' interests and their conveyance of a sense of concern regarding employees' well-being (Wallace et al., 2016). Employees who perceive organizational practices to be fair also tend to be more positive toward their work, more productive, more creative, and more efficient. Managers who can optimize engagement strategies by harmonizing policy intent with employee perception should see high employee productivity and creativity. Given the current economic environment, it is imperative that leaders attempt every effort to sustain and encourage a positive work environment. The results of this study offer insight for the avoidance or elimination of negative work engagement, insight to increase employee productivity, insight that could improve organizational outcomes, and reduce small business failure rates. Added indirect effects may actually reduce unnecessary organizational costs and potentially enhance employee health with reduced work (Holtz & Harold, 2013).

Significance to Theory

There is a consensus in the scholarly community that there is a positive correlation between employee engagement and desirable work outcomes (Anthony-McMann et al., 2017). An overgeneralization of the phenomenon has led to a decrease in theoretical as well as practical utility (Anthony-McMann et al., 2017). This study provides tangible insight that bridges the gap between theory and practicality.

This study offers what Madden and Bailey (2017) described as a more authentic look at the underlying context driving the definition of engagement. Shuck, Collins, Rocco, and Diaz (2016) stated that multiple sets of data, like the three in this case study, that focus on the engagement phenomenon, provide value that may include the creation of a solid research foundation. That foundation could then act as a blueprint to explore, in the proposed qualitative fashion, the depth and meaning of employee engagement via employee perceptions in the small business environment (Shuck et al., 2016).

Significance to Social Change

The costs of deviant and undesirable behaviors contribute directly to outright failure of the small business, as small businesses do not have the capacity to absorb and overcome toxic work behaviors (Kennedy & Benson, 2016). These costs are not only to the organization, but can also be harmful to other employees, negatively affect employee health due to increasing stress at work and damage the business' reputation in the community (Shoss, Jundt, Kobler, & Reynolds, 2015). Gaining understanding could lead to insights on how to better develop employee engagement strategies through better managerial understanding of employees' perception of injustices that signal or trigger flagging employee engagement. The implications for positive social change include the exploration of perceptions that could provide small business owners with better understanding of employee engagement and how to develop effective strategies that promote engagement by aligning manager and employee perspectives. Further implications for positive social change include the potential that this study could shed light on ways to reduce negative employee engagement in the future. Effective

engagement promotes positive organizational outcomes, improvement of overall

employee health, and reduction of small business failure rates (Holtz & Harold, 2013).

Summary and Transition

Kahn's (1990) work formed the foundation for what has become a growing

concept of employee engagement. Insights into employee engagement from the

alignment between the leader's engagement strategy intent and the employee's perception

of that intent, offer a new avenue for small business leaders to pursue. By using what

Kahn theorized as employees' levels of organizational commitment, involvement, and

availability, there is a link to outcomes that touch both the leadership side of the

organizational equation as well as the overall organizational climate of a business entity.

The subsequent literature review I conducted included the theoretical elements of Kahn's

(1990) work combined with the conceptualization of Ruck, Welch, and Menara's (2017)

notion of engagement and voice to scour academic data for relevant and recent elements

that tie engagement to potential testable leadership strategies. Chapter 2 will include the

literature review grounding the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The literature shows that there was a direct relationship between employee engagement and leaders' initiatives and actions. The general problem is that there can be a mismatch between a leader's engagement strategy intent and employees' perception of that strategy intent within small businesses (Kurtessis et al., 2017). This mismatch may negatively affect employee work performance and may be predictive of certain organizational climate issues that speak to the level of employee engagement commitment. The specific problem is that small business leaders may not consider seeking feedback on engagement strategies to assess their effectiveness until toxic work behavior becomes problematic (Volery et al., 2015).

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to explore the alignment or misalignment of employee perceptions of, and the leader's intent of, engagement strategies. The exploration occurred from the viewpoint of the employees of a small, Midwest business. My intent for this study was to uncover employees' perceptions of the strategies and how consistent they are with the intent of the business owner. I compared the results from face-to-face interviews to the results of a climate survey. I used the climate survey to assist in data triangulation to evaluate the climate of the organization in order to determine if the current organizational climate is consistent with the match or mismatch of employee perceptions and engagement. Through this study, I sought employee perceptions of strategies that supported employee engagement using a qualitative, single-case study by conducting member checking follow-up interviews to

ask probing questions of thirty employees from one small business outside of the metropolitan area of Omaha, Nebraska to achieve data saturation.

The following chapter begins with a description of the literature search strategy. A discussion of the theory of personal engagement and disengagement is next. Organization of the literature review occurs according to following three major themes: (a) Kahn's (1990) theory of personal engagement and disengagement at work, (b) organizational climate, and (c) employee engagement. Subtopics include the concepts of fairness, mindfulness, organizational outcomes, purpose, and meaningfulness. From the literature, there is cause for further study regarding employee perceptions regarding leader engagement strategies at work.

Literature Search Strategy

I guided my literature review by using key concepts pertaining to employee engagement, using the following databases: Google Scholar, Business Source Complete, ProQuest Central, SAGE Journals, Political Science Complete, Science Direct, EBSCO Discovery Services, PsycINFO, SAGE Management Journals, and the Thoreau Database at the Walden University Library. I often utilized Boolean techniques in key searches in the later stages of gap identification and included the following terms: *employee engagement, engagement at work, work engagement, employee voice, organizational climate, organizational climate AND employee voice, employee voice climate, organizational voice climate, employee AND voice NOT disengagement,* and *engagement climate survey.*

The literature for this review ranged in dates from 1975 to 2018. I used germinal works to begin to develop a search strategy for key terms. When I discovered a list of viable terms, I shifted my search to more contemporary articles and sources. When key terms changed, I was able to identify shifting trends in our field. From there, I was able to search new terms to link them to older ones used previously in the literature. As each key term developed, I had to narrow that term had to fit within the scope of this literature review to fill in gaps between employee voice, organizational climate, and engagement.

Conceptual Framework

I use Kahn's (1990) theory of employee engagement and disengagement as the lensing device for the conceptual framework of the study. Kahn (1990) first described employee engagement as the ability to harness employee's own physical, emotional, and cognitive attributes to achieve the leader's vision and organizational goals. Kahn (1990) cited three major psychological conditions where engagement is defined, naming these areas meaningfulness, safety, and availability. Kahn's theory (1990) explains causes and barriers to employee engagement and organizational commitment. Kahn (1990) discovered that engaged employees express themselves on many levels when involved in tasks that they believe are meaningful, have positive purpose, and that are safe. When engaged employees feel that they have the correct assets to complete meaningful tasks, they tend to express themselves on levels emotionally, physically, and cognitively (Kahn, 1990). Conversely, when leaders lead irresponsibly, employee engagement decreases as employee withdraw increases (Kahn, 1990).

Kahn's (1990) theory allows for the exploration of gaps where small business owners in the Midwest can develop strategies to increase employee engagement and overall organizational productivity, efficiency, and business reputation. Mone and London (2018) amplified some of the required employee engagement conditions by adding similar elements of empowerment, team learning, and transparent communication going both ways up and down the chain of command regarding performance. Such information aids in showing the importance of internal communication practices within an organization as these practices have shown direct links to employee engagement behaviors (Karanges, Johnston, Beatson, & Lings, 2015).

Given the qualitative nature of this study, I focused on the phenomenon of employee engagement using a conceptual framework based on Kahn's (1990) theory of personal engagement and disengagement at work. The body of literature showed that modern leaders need to develop their employees through conceptual understanding and practices and policies that encourage positive and productive employee behaviors (Mazzei et al., 2016). Insights into employee engagement strategies and employee perceptions of those strategies provided significant insights into increasing employee and organizational performance and demonstrated an overall need for this study.

Kahn (1990) theorized that employees' levels of organizational commitment, involvement, and availability link to the organizational climate of a business entity. Additionally, employee engagement is an important index of organizational climate and is directly linked to certain desired organizational outcomes (Saks & Gruman, 2014; Simpson, 2009). Examples of such outcomes can include injury-reducing behaviors and

overall improved organizational safety climates (Huang et al., 2016). The key concepts of employee engagement and organizational climate connect with Kahn's (1990) overarching theory of engagement.

Guided by the concept of employee perception versus leader intent, I explored in this research how employees perceive their work environment, work tasks, and work purpose all under the umbrella of Kahn's theory. Using this approach, my intent was to understand what employees perceive regarding strategies a small, Midwest business owner used to improve employee engagement. Through the use of structured interview questions and a climate assessment survey, I explored elements of the concept of organizational climate that impacted the phenomenon of employee engagement at work.

Literature Review

Personal Engagement and Disengagement Theory

The germinal work regarding personal engagement and disengagement theory resulted from the work of William Kahn in 1990. Kahn (1990) broke the new engagement landscape into two major areas labeled *personal engagement* and *personal disengagement*. These labels eventually morphed into employee engagement over the years. The cornerstone of Kahn's (1990) germinal work consisted of three psychological conditions that predicated a worker's engagement orientation at work. Kahn (1990) labeled these three conditions as meaningfulness of the work, safety in the work environment, and psychological availability. Kahn (1990) defined the two concepts as the demonstration of behaviors that workers bring with them and leave out while in the performance of work roles along a continuum.

People who are engaged are high performing employees who are resourceful, creative, and innovative (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). Disengaged employees tend to be skeptical of leadership initiatives, cognitively distant while at work, all which result in reduced productivity, high absentee rates, and less engaged in the work (Kompaso & Sridevi, 2010). Kahn (1990) stated that disengaged employees display avoidant behaviors, are lackadaisical in completing work tasks, and feel as if they have limited opportunities to advance. Kahn's (1990) theory of employee engagement connects to employee voice, climate, and organizational environmental factors directly to ineffective organizational cultural values, aversion to work in a team setting, and overall physical, emotional, and cognitive absenteeism (Hollis, 2015).

Since the advent of Kahn (1990), seven studies have specifically alluded to Kahn's work, drawing a link to the three previously-mentioned psychological antecedents of perceived meaningfulness at work, psychological safety in the work environment, and experienced availability from the viewpoint of the employee (Bailey et al., 2017). These antecedents of finding meaning, being safe, and making one's self open or available, parallel Maslow's (1943) needs hierarchy where safety and security are required before employees can experience inclusion and find meaning. Given this, examination of the engagement and disengagement phenomenon from the vantage point of employee perceptions about the work environment seems prudent (Simpson, 2009).

Employee engagement. Although Bailey et al. (2017) stated that there are significant gaps in the current definitions and measurements of employee engagement, several scholars agree that engagement is characterized by what Cahill et al. (2015)

described as the psychological phenomenon of employee engagement as one which the

individual exhibits vigor, task absorption, and dedication to the work tasks at hand. Vigor

is characterized by enthusiasm and mental dedication, task absorption is characterized as

being engrossed and fully dedicated to work tasks, and dedication being characterized by

inspiration, pride, and commitment to organizational and personal goal achievement and

the challenges that accompany each (Zhong, Wayne, & Liden, 2016). From this

perspective, employee engagement is an intrinsic expression of cognitive and physical

resources that influence personal motivation (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016). Engaged

employees actively participate in the work environment and consider themselves a valued

member of the organization committed to achieving the mission and/or the leader's

vision. One can summarize engagement as an expression of cognitive and physical

resources, characterized as positive, and occurring in the work environment, stemming

from active and motivational concepts (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016).

Other pertinent areas critical to the understanding of engagement are related to the

experience of the individual employee (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). Such an

understanding could bridge the gap in understanding the broader connections between the

individual employee's experience and how that variable effects and is affected by outside

variables like organizational alignment (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). One way to

accomplish this is through examining employee's perceptions of the world around them.

Employee perception is a measure of their level of psychological empowerment and can

demonstrate whether the employee feels as if they have a role in the molding of the

organizational environment (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017). Given this area of focus, one

can begin to see the need for organizational leaders to be aware of how their employees perceive their organizational surroundings as well as how these employees conceptualize in-place organizational engagement strategies. Using the insight gained from similar themes in the literature, one can see the potential benefits of examining the engagement phenomenon through the lens of employee experience given their unique perceptions of the organizational environment.

Employee disengagement. Kahn (1990) explained that disengagement can lead to a lack of individual growth in employees as well as a reduced quality of commitment within an organization. Kahn (1990) also provided the germinal definition of the phenomenon of personal disengagement generally characterized by emotional disconnection, cognitive aloofness, and being physically idle. Kahn (1990) elaborated on personal disengagement, further characterizing the phenomenon as a choice to disconnect from one's desired self, with behaviors that perpetrate a lack of prescribed role performance, emotional absenteeism, and overall physical, emotional, and cognitive withdraw. For these reasons, the manifestation of personal disengagement can be harmful to the disengaged employee, harmful to those charged to work with the disengaged, and costly to the organization.

Rastogi et al. (2018) took Kahn's (1990) construct and branched off to examine the employee perspectives of disengagement. Bouckenooghe et al. (2014) and Valentine (2014) provided further grounding sources showing substance when examining employee emotions and consequences for private sector employers. Valentine (2014) began by exploring organizational and professional constructs of disengagement whereby these

elements directly drove employee emotions leading to disengagement behavior. Bouckenooghe et al. (2014) also began with Kahn's construct, and tied in the consequences of employee emotions that link to Valentine's (2014) organizational construct. The resulting model, stated by Rastogi et al. (2018), is that organizational elements like perceived loss of supervisory support, perceived toxicity within the organization, and perceived loss of organizational support. All of these lead to potential employee disengagement and Rastogi et al. (2018) bridged these antecedents of disengagement directly to employee perception.

Risks of disengagement. Disengagement in the work environment is characterized by a withdraw or other behaviors that promote a lack of connection, physical as well as mental disconnection, and passiveness also characterized by emotional withdraw (Kahn, 1990). Disengagement in work tasks causes an employee to become distracted or completely unconnected with many aspects of the task environment, as well as within the organization. Disengagement can range from a lack of focus to complete withdraw from all tasks. As a result, disengagement can cause employee harm on a mental level as well as damage to the organization.

[[The above was the last page I edited thoroughly, so please be sure to continue through this chapter and make the appropriate changes, as they are indicated above.]]

The cost of disengagement. Disengagement comes at a tangible and substantial cost. The cost of employee disengagement can manifest in two main ways. The first is *employee harm*. Employee harm can be brought about because of disengagement for

many reasons. One of the most intense causes of disengagement-related employee harm stems from lack of employee focus. When the disengagement trait of lack of focus manifests, employees tend not to concentrate on the task at hand or do not accomplish the task as prescribed. This lack of focus or choice not to follow the prescribed process could lead to employee injury causing unnecessary harm to the individual and those around them (Hollis, 2015).

Another cost of employee disengagement manifests as *organizational harm*. Like employee harm discussed previously, employees also cause organizational harm when injury occurs due to the employee failing to follow prescribed task accomplishment processes. Some of these prescribed processes are rooted in safety discipline. Organizations harm can occur through the potential fiscal cost of employee injury in addition to the loss of productivity that results. Additionally, organizations suffer from void in the work force caused by having to replace workers suffering from injury of this sort. Other of Hollis's (2015) examples of organizational harm, stemming from employee disengagement, cover the spectrum from low productivity all the way to the drain of training replacements. Low productivity is a result of employee lack of effort at job tasks which can lead to turnover caused by management-mandated firing or the employee voluntarily quitting (Hollis, 2015). This key ingredient causes turnover and requires the use of additional organizational resources for training replacements. There are still several other byproducts of disengagement that could result from low productivity and turnover. These harmful byproducts include lack of an organizational cultural identity or values, lack of trust, disassociation from organizational goals, and lack of teamwork that

can all manifest in low productivity/high turnover organizational environments (Hollis, 2015).

With an estimated 70% of the total workforce in a state of passive or active disengagement, it is clear to see that workforce disengagement levies a substantial burden on business organizations (Rastogi et al., 2018). From an internal examination, disengagement can also occur as a result of the quality of the exchange relationship they have fostered with their supervisors or chain of command. (Huang, Wellman, Ashford, Lee, & Wang, 2017). An employees' perception of how they fit in to an organization can also lead to increased engagement when employees understand and are compatible with organizational objectives, and disengagement tendencies when that perception is not in harmony (Hejjas, Miller, & Scarles, 2018). When looking at external factors, when employees perceive viable external employment opportunities from outside their own organization, employees tend to participate in morally deviant behaviors and often chose to become disengaged (Huang et al., 2017). Huang et al. (2017) also stated that disengagement can also occur when employees perceive an unstable work environment as a result of job insecurity. Given this information, it becomes relevant for leaders to understand the current organizational environment in order to assess engagement goals as they compare to perceived engagement variables like the ones discussed here.

Citizenship culture versus withdraw. Employee withdraw behaviors cover a wide variety of behaviors that tend to be less than desirable for an organization and include tardiness, absenteeism, and even turnover (Smith, Micich, & McWilliams, 2016). The literature has shown that employee withdraw behaviors have a negative impact on an

organization's financial impact as well as negative effects on organizational effectiveness and efficiency (Smith et al., 2016; Thomas, Ambrosini, & Hughes, 2017). Smith et al. (2016) demonstrated that employees that engage in organizational citizen behaviors are less likely to take part in withdraw behaviors and less likely to be tardy or absent. As a result, organizational leaders that develop opportunities for employees to participate in organizational citizenship behaviors can reap the benefits of lower levels of employee tardiness and absenteeism. Employee perspectives of these potential opportunities would be viable to managers as these perspectives might show alignment or misalignment with management's current strategy. Additional research proves elements of this through the indication of a positive correlation between citizenship behavior and job satisfaction; yet another potential benefit (Smith et al., 2016).

Employee Voice

Marchington (2016) identified employee voice as an established academic and managerial term. Employee voice offers a measurement for employee commitment, involvement, and participation (Marchington, 2016; Ruck et al., 2017). With a major emphasis of the work on engagement and leadership focused on the power dynamic between management and employees, there remains an opportunity to create new knowledge in the study of employee voice within the context of management's strategy to achieve engagement and how front-line employees perceive that strategy (Madden & Bailey, 2017). Employee voice holds value to the field in that this lens offers the ability to gauge Kahn's (1990) concept of the social aspect of engagement including

commitment, involvement, and organizational participation (Kahn, 1990; Ruck et al., 2017).

Employee voice can be negative because of its nature to challenge norms already in place or to change established status quo (Chou & Barron, 2016). Managerial interpretation of employee voice behaviors remains mixed. Also, the literature shows that managerial interpretation of the employee voice behavior depends on the method of message reception. In other words, the manner in which the voice behavior is exhibited drastically influences how the receiver of that voice behavior is interpreted (Chou & Barron, 2016). These sets of facts show that employee voice remains an important aspect in organizational success, especially when examining the phenomenon from a manager's perception. Before one can link voice climate to engagement, there must first be an understanding as to how the communication process within an organization begins and mature.

Running contrary to the notion of employee voice being an important variable in strong employee engagement is Detert and Treviño's (2010) posture that some employee vocalizations of problems can act as a distraction, or that voicing such information may come at great personal cost; far outweighing the potential benefit. Organizational climate becomes an important antidote to this potential pitfall because of the potential perception of employee voice behaviors when communicated by management. Hartnell, Kinicki, Lambert, Fugate, and Doyle (2016) stated the importance for organizational leaders to be aware of these elements of organizational culture to adapt. One overarching reason for this need for awareness is that a particular leadership style that has worked in the past

may not work from now on (Hartnell et al., 2016). Hartnell et al. (2016) specifically cited

upward feedback as a significant finding in this domain, further solidifying the necessity

for employee voice as a way of achieving this feedback, thereby ensuring employee

perception of leadership meets the leader's desired intent.

Communication theory states that within an organization, each party acts

according to established norms predicated by the established organizational climate. Each

party weighs the obligation to the contributor, the involved incentives, and the required

amount of energy involved in making the exchange. This framework of employee-

organizational relationships is predicated upon several elements of the organizational

climate, particularly the perceptions and beliefs the employee has regarding the

organization as well as the perception of obligation the employee feels toward that

organization. As a result, Eldor and Vigoda-Gadot (2017) recommend making the

employee-organizational relationship a focus item to improve the quality of exchanges

that take place. This notion can be taken a step further to emphasize the importance of

organizational climate regarding norms and mutual exchange to enhance engagement

strategies that harmonize the employee perspective in order to parallel that perspective

with management's objective and intent.

Organizational Communication

There are several theories and models that aid in the understanding of

organizational communication. Parke and Myeong-Gu (2017) described elements of

organizational climate as the sharing of procedures, behaviors, emotions, and policy that

influence organizational outcomes. Social exchange theory (SET) is one aspect that can

set the backdrop for understanding how elements of organizational communication link to employee engagement via climate, policy, and behavior. SET explains that each communication action, whether by leader or follower, has variables. Monge and Contractor (2003) notably labeled these exchange variables as potential risk, potential reward, and cost. SET focuses on how elements of communication can tie into elements of organizational norms and organizational climate to change the weight of each variable in the risk-reward-cost equation (Zhao, Chen, Wang, & Chen, 2017). This framework of employee-organizational relationships serves as the foundation for several elements of the organizational climate, particularly the perceptions and beliefs the employee has regarding the organization as well as the perception of obligation the employee feels toward that organization. As a result, Eldor and Vigoda-Gadot (2017) recommend making the employee-organizational relationship a focus item to improve the quality of exchanges that take place. This notion can be taken a step further to emphasize the importance of organizational climate regarding norms and mutual exchange to enhance engagement strategies that harmonize the employee perspective to parallel that perspective with management's objective and intent.

Organizational communication is a complex and multifaceted domain that has changed drastically on the past half century. The domain of communication within an organization, according to Salem and Timmerman (2017), encompasses verbal/nonverbal communication, internal/external forms of communication, communication technology, and the varied levels of relationship when describing the process of communication. Summarizing Salem and Timmerman (2017), the communication process is complex and

requires several variables to categorize, but the application of organizational communication can be directed toward organizational improvement. Specifically regarding this research, communication designed for organizational improvement examines verbal and nonverbal communication between organizational managers and lower level employees for the purpose of establishing organizational norms and enforcing organizational standards of behavior. The level of relationship in nonverbal communication between managers and lower-level employees is one on an individual or small group level, appropriate for the business in this case. One way in which communication can guide our understanding of organizational climate is by using leader-member exchange theory as a lens to conceptualize organizational communication and voice climate.

Understanding Communication Via Leader-Member Exchange

The germinal work that formed the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory was introduced by Dansereau, Graen, and Haga (1975). The communication process between subordinates and their leaders begins once an employee becomes part of an organization (Dansereau et al., 1975). Dansereau et al. (1975) introduced the germinal work that formed what scholars now call leader-member exchange (LMX) theory and further divided by Omilion-Hodges and Baker (2017) into two process phases called role taking and role making.

Dansereau et al. (1975) discussed the role taking process as the beginning point, marked by the leader presenting the new member with opportunities to demonstrate their abilities and capabilities regarding the new job and required tasks (Omilion-Hodges &

Baker, 2017). During role taking, the leader chooses the opportunity to assess the

newcomer's approach to new tasks in addition to how the newcomer prefers to

communicate (Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2017). Considering this information, the leader

has the responsibility to model the desired norm for communication. In the initial phases

of the role taking process allows the leader a good opportunity to collect data on the

newcomer that defines several potential vital qualities that effect organizational

outcomes. Role taking offers vital clues regarding the newcomer including

communication style and may speak to overall newcomer compatibility to assimilate to

organizational norms. By being cognizant of the importance of the role taking phase

when using LMX as a lens for conceptualizing communication, leaders may be able to

better assist organizational newcomers in their assimilation to their new work climate.

Such assistance may positively impact organizational outcomes, identify future

engagement markers, and influence long-term employee overall wellbeing.

　　　　The next phase of the communication process seen through the lens of LMX is

role making. Role making further advises the process of newcomer assimilation into the

new organization. During the role taking phase, the supervisor and the new subordinate

take part in a back-and-forth tennis match of adapting to each other's roles that fit

individual needs and levels of skill (Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2017). This phase is

heavily influenced by trust in that each person in making continual assessments of the

other's accountability, specifically that of the newcomer's level of assimilation to

organizational norms. This area offers the leader valuable information that will guide the

level of closeness in the relationship moving forward (Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2017).

This step is the first formal opportunity for the newcomer to test the communication and voice climate for themselves, based on what was modeled to them by their leader. Increased perceived trust and reciprocity may indicate correct assimilation where a mismatch might indicate to the newcomer that they may have incorrectly interpreted the organization's voice climate.

The importance of communication is demonstrated further in the critical role making phase highlighted in the communication process, providing the employee valuable information on the process involved in successful assimilation as well as personal development goals and accompanied expectations (Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2017). This means that a leader's approach to the communication process in this phase of the business relationship can have drastic effects on both leader and member interpersonal relationship health as well as groundwork for building a lasting trust (Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2017). The result is that leaders entering this phase of the communications development process can increase or decrease the quality of organizational relationships based upon that leader's level of cognition regarding the process combined with the leader's approach to communication in that phase. In all, these relationships could affect both parties' interpersonal health as well as the health of the organization.

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process can increase or decrease the quality of organizational relationships based upon that leader's level of cognition regarding the process combined with the leader's approach to communication in that phase. These relationships could affect both parties' interpersonal health as well as the health of the organization.

Lloyd, Boer, and Voelpel (2017) round out the concepts of communication through the lens of LMX theory by identifying organizational performance indicators found when perception of supervisor listening positively correlates to employee perception of support. The critical role making phase in the LMX process demonstrates the importance of communication, providing the employee valuable information on the process involved in successful assimilation as well as personal development goals and accompanied expectations (Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2017). This means that a leader's approach to the communication process in this phase of LMX can have drastic effects on both leader and member interpersonal relationship health as well as groundwork for building a lasting trust (Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2017). Leaders entering this phase of the LMX process can increase or decrease the quality of organizational relationships based upon that leader's level of cognition regarding the process combined with the leader's approach to communication in that phase of LMX. These relationships could affect both parties' interpersonal health as well as the health of the organization.

When present, this perception can also link to perceptions regarding organizational climate, specifically to perceptions of organizational openness regarding voice climate as well as organizational support attributes (Lloyd et al., 2017). If leaders are cognizant of the communication process and take employees' perceptions into

account, followers are more likely to feel listened to, feel more connected to the organization, and feel supported as well as comfortable exercising their voice. The combination of the elements of engagement, voice climate, and communication structure all combine to create part of the overall organizational climate. In our quest to understand how organizational climate link to engagement, we need to see exactly how a leader's ability to perceive these discrete elements can ultimately affect the engagement outcome from the perspective of the employees.

Organizational Climate

Organizational climate is the environment internal to an organization composed of shared visions and norm that reaches into the psychological domain, differing from one organization to another (Hartnell et al., 2016; Nasution, Mahargiono, & Soesatyo, 2016). These norms, organizational culture can affect employee engagement through social networks as well as other influences within the organization components (Hartnell et al., 2016). Managers and leaders remain one of the most powerful influences within an organization. Organizational climate can bring managers and workers together in an efficient way. This type of organizational climate can assist in achieving organizational goals; an asset to small businesses. Nasution et al. (2016) stated that creating an organizational climate that brings members together to meet organizational goals, while simultaneously driving employees to improve performance, can be difficult. Nasution et al. (2016) specified a disparity between what employees perceive and the leader's expected climate as the main reason for not achieving harmony. One could postulate that if managers were aware of employee perceptions and took these perceptions into

consideration when crafting the expected climate, organizational efficiency and employee growth might improve.

The role of the leader is important to an organization and can affect the outcome of organizational climate positively or negatively. As a result of the fact that leaders have such influence on their organizations, leaders need to take into consideration the goals of their members in order to achieve productivity growth and overall business success. Positive maximization of organizational climate can occur when leaders maintain steady and stable organizational conditions so that employees remain focused on productivity expectations rather than change variables.

Organizational climate directly effects employee behavior as well as performance (Ehrhart & Kuenzi, 2017). An organizational climate that fosters employee innovation and support could spur a competitive advantage for that organization in the global marketplace (Shanker, Bhanugopan, Van der Heijden, & Farrell, 2017). Shanker et al. (2017) stated that when leaders fail to see the connection between organizational climate and employee innovation, the potential for a competitive advantage can be lost. These ideas merge to form an area where organizational climate, influenced by the leaders of an organization, can influence the actions of employees. Parke & Myeong-Gu (2017) described elements of organizational climate as procedures, behaviors, emotions, and policy that are shared and that influence organizational outcomes. If employees are influenced by an organizational climate that fosters or tolerates dishonesty or theft, there are employees that will interpret that tolerance as an organizationally approved behavior. Similarly, an organizational climate of cooperation and support will impart teamwork and

growth in followers. These factors demonstrate that organizational climate has many aspects that influence organizational outcomes as well as employee behaviors.

Another area critical to the understanding of engagement lies with the experience of the individual employee (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). Such an understanding could bridge the gap in understanding the broader connections between the individual employee's experience and how that variable effects and is affected by outside variables like organizational alignment (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). One way to accomplish this is through examining employee's perceptions of the world around them. Employee perception is a measure of their level of psychological empowerment and can demonstrate whether the employee feels as if they have a role in the molding of the organizational environment (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017). In order to link the importance of organizational climate with engagement, we need only look back at one of Kahn's (1990) main points stating that engagement is the harvesting of employees' selves into their respective work roles. If the organizational climate is such that employees participate in organizationally-valued behaviors at higher rates, then organizational climate is such that said climate is promoting employee engagement. This is an important link because organizational climate can manifest as a catalyst that impacts perception, voice behaviors, and several other aspects that impart influence on an employee's level of engagement at work. All these facets have a great opportunity for impact on organizational outcomes.

Scholars have stated that organizations can be capable of creating unique cultures that serve to increase that organization's competitive advantage (Lee & Kramer, 2016).

Such cultures can serve to foster closer relationships, improve communication processes, and even clarify assigned tasks (Zohar & Hofmann, 2012). Improving overall organizational performance and effectiveness requires a firm understanding of an organization's climate and underlying culture (Glisson, 2015). It is in fact the organizational culture by which members belonging to an organization set both personal and professional goals, effect tasks, and allocate the needed resources to achieve these goals and tasks (Huyghe & Knockaert, 2015). These facts demonstrate that organizational culture has multiple facets. Organizational culture influences the way employees feel, act, and interpret their work environment as well as the influence on institutional norms and standards from the standpoint of directing desired actions and behaviors used to steer toward business goals (Huyghe & Knockaert, 2015). The culture of an organization plays a critical role in social aspects of an organization which have been proven to be at the core of effectiveness and employee innovation; specifically, when viewed in the context of human services (Glisson, 2015). As a result of the powerful influence that organizational culture can have on the organization as a whole, as well as the effect it can have on individuals associated with the organization, scholars should be interested in assessing the culture as part of the overall organizational climate.

Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived organizational support originates with the act of communicating and interacting with others in the work environment (Brown & Roloff, 2015). Going deeper, perceived organizational support emerges when employees form a macro-level perception regarding the degree in which the overall organization uses, benefits, or

determines the significance of worker contributions and the level of concern the

organization holds regarding employee well-being (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Higher levels

of perceived organizational support are linked to higher levels of employee job

satisfaction, higher levels of commitment, and an overall increase in organizational

performance as a result (Brown & Roloff, 2015; Zhong et al., 2016). The contrary has

also proven to be true as well. Shantz, Alfes, and Latham (2016) showed that low levels

of perceived organizational support lead to lower levels of work engagement, an increase

in deviant work behavior, and higher levels of turnover intent. This data suggests that it is

no longer feasible for leaders to increase organizational support to further a successful

organization. Leaders must then follow up on their support measures by gauging the

degree in which the support offered is received and perceived by the workforce within an

organization.

The Role of Reward and Recognition

Organizational leaders and managers may find the application of rewards as a

viable option to influence employee behavior and performance. Thomas et al., (2017)

explained that some rewards can be intrinsic while others are extrinsic. Intrinsic reward

examples include pride in a job well done, work satisfaction, and a feeling of

accomplishment. Extrinsic rewards include output rewards associated with meeting

deadlines of productivity quotas and can even include process rewards used to achieve

objectives and develop strategy (Thomas et al., 2017). Process rewards are a key

ingredient in employee development because such rewards are linked to goal setting and

competency measurement (Thomas et al., 2017).

Process rewards are also valuable to employee engagement because of the information they provide managers regarding employee performance. As a result of this ability for process rewards to call for a mid-course correction in performance, managers can use process rewards to alter performance outcomes by implementing a shift in strategy. By way of this example, process rewards allow managers the ability to see performance at any given time and adjust the current strategy to achieve a goal they would otherwise have fallen short of.

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is derived from the study of performance management. One critical area of performance management is that of *strategic formulation*. Pasha, Poister, Wright, and Thomas, (2017) defined strategic formulation as the process of charting the organizational course, establishing goals and targets along the way while planning for strategic alternatives across the spectrum of the process to achieve the previously established goals.

At the heart of this research is the role that strategic planning plays in the strategy to keep and grow employees in addition to management's role in defining immoral behavior. Moving forward, strategic planning offers insight into how management identifies, acknowledge, and responds to undesirable behavior. Neis, Pereira, and Maccari (2017) identified the viability of this string of logic by stating that organizational structure is one of the key components in implementing successful strategy because of how the structure of an organization dictates just how the organization performs and executes strategy. Strategic planning can set the stage for improved organizational

climate by using employee voice to form a way ahead for ways to mentor and better communicate institutional norms.

A Brief Statement about Leader Intent

Recent research findings indicated that perceived leader identity elements were predictive of higher work engagement among employees (Steffens, Yang, Jetten, Haslam, & Lipponen, 2017). Additionally, elements of a leader's intentions play directly into what becomes a leader's perceived identity (Epitropaki, Kark, Mainemelis, & Lord, 2017). Given that a leader's identity and even on a deeper level, a leaders intent is able to directly impact burnout, reduce turnover intentions, and increased work engagement, it behooves researchers to further understand just how leaders can create and develop leader identity that can be shared among led (Steffens et al., 2017). Details regarding how this research project will capture leader intent is included in the *data collection* section of this paper.

Mentoring and Apprenticeship

Business apprenticeship is a deliberate process of mentoring the next generation of organizational employees to replace and grow to become the future of a business. Billett (2016) describes the process of apprenticeship as the transfer of vocational knowledge and behavior from one person to the next, usually a learner, in a way that advances or preserves skill knowledge from experienced practitioners to those coming up in similar ranks. Apprenticeship allows the opportunity to build trust, for the apprentice to take risks in a safe environment, and the opportunity to learn under the close supervision of someone with potentially more experience. Daly (2017) showed that those

studying under apprenticeship models are able to grow and develop a unique professional

identity, often work in autonomy due to increased trust, and offer organizations the

luxury of affordability and accessibility. Business should see value in the trainers and in

the apprentices, as one develops future talent and one may one day assume that role.

Given this information, business leaders choosing to prepare their organizations for future

success should remain cognizant of how the role of that of teacher or trainer and that of

the learner can be equally important (Smith et al., 2016). Putting it all together,

apprenticeship allows an organization like a small business the cost benefit of developing

future talent under the proven tutelage of a skilled and trusted practitioner with

established longevity within the organization. That trust allows the opportunity for skill

to be transferred in a fashion that could benefit the future of said organization.

Apprenticeship opportunities, much like strategic planning, is one way leaders can form

an organizational climate conducive to establishing organizational norms, open

communication channels, and potentially drive improved levels of employee engagement.

The Selection of an Exploratory Case Study Methodology

I classified this research project as an exploratory case study design. Yin (2009)

stated that case studies increase understanding of contemporary events in which the

researcher is unable or not wanting to alter behavior. The phenomenon of engagement

and, in particular, employee engagement is widely considered contemporary, receiving

much attention across a wide array of disciplines including public relations in addition to

management (Lemon & Palenchar, 2018). The researcher in this project had no control of

the phenomenon of engagement or the behaviors associated with engagement effecting

the case. My overall goal was to discover elements that create harmony or imbalance between employee perceptions of engagement strategies as compared to management's governing intent. Based on these facts, Yin's (2018) prescription for a case study appeared to be most prudent.

This research design for this dissertation was an exploratory case study. The research questions reflected both overarching research questions for the qualitative component and utilized three data sources. Yin (2018) described qualitative case study research as having the ability to inquire about the *how* and *why* of a contemporary phenomenon where I can interact with the people involved without manipulating the relevant behaviors. This rich tradition allowed the researcher to become the instrument and provides a unique lens to explore and examine a certain phenomenon. The addition of a climate survey allowed for triangulation of data related to the phenomenon by using a finely tuned and previously validated instrument to rigorously scrutinize a set of variables (Brannen, 2017). Given these two valuable facts, the three sources of data provided the best of both worlds when attempting to examine and understand a unique, contemporary phenomenon.

As case studies continue to gain more and more acceptance as a reliable method of studying complex phenomena in a real-world setting, the way one conducts case study research needs to be carefully planned to uphold the integrity of the underlying research (Harrison, Birks, Franklin, & Mills, 2017). One way this can be achieved is by remaining mindful about one's own philosophical orientation and how that orientation spills over into case study research. As an example of this, Harrison et al. (2017) break down case

study research into three generally accepted world views of relativism, realism, and constructivism. Merriam (1998) adopts a constructivist view that requires our own socialization to bring meaning and understanding to experiences. Although worldviews very from one person to the next, case study research requires the careful consideration of the researcher's worldview when designing the architecture of the research plan.

Yin (2018) exemplifies the use of realism in case study methods through the application of objectivism as fuel that propels empirical inquiry. Stake (2006) advocates the same rigor and empirical inquiry but does so through the philosophical orientation of relativism. In this relativist orientation, Stake (2006) examines the underlying meaning within bounded contexts.

Further support for the utilization of a case study comes from Yin's (2018) description of case study research as that which attempts to expound understanding of contemporary phenomenon through empirical inquiry. As a result of the fact that the researcher in this case could not isolate the phenomenon of engagement from the organizational or small business environment, I studied the players within the confines of the organization to study all the variables making up that phenomenon. Case studies often allow for enriched experiences through their access to places others may not have the opportunity to explore (Cronin, 2014).

Yin (2018) indicated some concerns when conducting case study research. Confusion, rigor, a potential unmanageable level of effort, unfair comparable advantage, and generalization are some concerns Yin (2018) indicated as concerns when conducting

case study research. Applicable to this research project was the concerns regarding

confusion, generalization, and rigor. Each offer an entry point for weakness in a degraded

or unsatisfactory research project if not addressed. These are traditional concerns because

they have made case study research less desirable in the past as a result of hastily

conducted, or sloppy, research (Yin, 2014). Yin summarized that a lack of a systematic

process when embarking on case study research make experiment or survey research a

more desirable approach.

Generalization

Yin (2018) stated that generalization often occurs in case study research as a

result of the researcher attempting to apply case population behaviors and traits to a

larger population. Generalization could be positive or negative given the situation. As

Hancock and Algozzine (2017) stated, generalization used to infer or illustrate research

outcomes allow the findings to be allied to a larger sample or a sample beyond the

general scope of one particular case. To mitigate this concern, prudency dictates that the

researcher develop research questions that attempt to expand rather than generalize the

study to a more universal population. I attempted to expand and generalize the

engagement theory rather than guessing at possible reasons for its manifestation within

the case population. Lastly, this study purpose was to build upon a depth of

understanding as to why the phenomenon of engagement or disengagement occurred in

light of the elements of employee voice and organizational climate rather than seeking

reasons based on the presence of these variables. On the other hand, consistent to Stake's

(1995) design illustration, the focus of the study was also to explain engagement

perceptions within a small, Midwest business, it may be possible to apply generalization in the research findings as a jumping off point to seek connections to other similarly structured small business in similar locations.

Confusion

Yin (2018) explained that generalization in case study research occurs when confused with the case study type in this research project and that of case studies used for teaching. The two are not interoperable as teaching case studies involve the manipulation of variables within the study to demonstrate the viability of a different outcome. Ketokivi and Choi (2014) stated that one of the basic qualities of scientific research is transparency. Transparency allows the beneficiaries of research to see exactly hoe the researcher got from Point A to Point B, or, when weighing the value of an argument, have a clear view of the logic that went into the assessment and an unobstructed view of the premise that supports the underlying assumption (Ketokivi & Choi, 2014). The goal of this research project was to study as well as record current variables in order to better understand the current engagement outcomes within the bounds of this particular case.

Rigor

Yin (2018) stated that probably the largest concern regarding case study research is whether the research is rigorous enough rather than being conducted in a sloppy fashion. Often, lack of systemic procedures and the influence of evidence that is not substantiated, infiltrate the project, and cause the researcher to bias their conclusion based upon these weaknesses (Yin, 2009). Cronin (2014) also cautioned that a rigorous data collection protocol is important when speaking about overall research reliability.

Adherence to strict university IRB standards ensured that this research met the rigorous demands of doctoral research. Using multiple data sources in case study research provided the ability to interleave or triangulate key data points and integrate with other research approaches, making the approach appropriate for addressing complex questions (Ivankova, & Wingo, 2018). Ketokivi and Choi (2014) advanced the notion that case study research rigor is determined by the way the researcher applies distinctive deliberate characteristics to their research combined with transparency with regard to reasoning. Additionally, the inclusion of a climate survey design into this research project aided in triangulation, added depth, richness, and what Yin (2018) described as a stronger foundation of information vice a single or double set of data.

The integration barrier. With any complex endeavor, there can be barriers to success. Using multiple sources of data in case study research is no exception. Bryman (2007) lists integration as just such a barrier that hinders the integration research with multiple sets of data, including barriers caused by research question construction that ultimately dilute the research findings. In this case, the integration barrier caused the findings to become diluted due to the fact that the varying data components did not integrate in order to inform the big picture surrounding the phenomenon (O'Cathain et al., 2010).

Mitigating the integration barrier. O'Cathain et al. (2010) offered a viable solution to the integration problem applicable to this study given the multiple data sets, through the development of a triangulation protocol. One example of protocol development occurred in this study through the selection of coded key words that

emerged from the qualitative interview data. From there, these key themes were used to explore similar embedded themes, metaphors, and overall codes. Using this process, the three sources of data in this case study became sufficiently merged, coherent, and triangulated across the three portions of data in the study (Archibald, Radil, Zhang, & Hanson, 2015).

Justification for Type and Sequence

The climate assessment portion of this study provided a deeper meaning and contextual understanding of the interview data. The qualitative interviews occurred first. Immediately after the conclusion of the interview, I handed the respondents the climate survey to complete. I carefully chose after much consideration to conduct the qualitative interviews first and then analyze the climate data. This sequencing afforded me the opportunity to triangulate findings within the context of the research question while mitigating the risk of shoe-horning findings using my own assumptions. Instead, I added to the depth and richness of the qualitative interview process by connecting themes also present in the survey. By doing so, I was able to efficiently and effectively blend the three data sets in a way that deepens and enriches the resulting knowledge.

<div align="center">

Summary and Conclusions

</div>

This chapter began with a brief overview of the planned study. After a brief explanation of the literature review search strategy, I described the basic content of the literature review regarding the theory of personal engagement and disengagement at work. I then broke the literature into major sections, based on themes in the literature, containing organizational climate, employee voice, and the justification for the use of a

case study methodology. The literature revealed that there is a lot known regarding how elements of organizational climate, employee voice, and organizational communication effect employee engagement. The literature also revealed a current gap where little is known regarding how strategic planning, specifically the alignment between a leader's intent and how that intent is perceived by employees, drives engagement within an organization. There are also gaps in how organizational climate elements may be predictive of engagement behaviors within an organization. My intent was to attempt to address these specific gaps using current climate variables as predictive elements to strategic goals and how they are perceived by the employee workforce. I doing so, I was able to identify areas where alignment and misalignment occurred between leader intent and employee perception. In this chapter, I presented a logic bridge to the next chapter where the research design is presented.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to explore the alignment or misalignment of employee perceptions of, and the leader's intent of, engagement strategies. The exploration occurred from the viewpoint of the employees of a small, Midwest business as compared to the leader's intent of the strategies. My intent for this study was to uncover employees' perceptions of the strategies and how consistent they were with the intent of the business owner. I compared the results from face-to-face interviews with the results of a climate survey. I used the climate survey to assist me in data triangulation and was administered to evaluate the climate of the organization in order to determine if the current organizational climate was consistent with the match or mismatch of employee perceptions and engagement. Comparing a leader's strategic intent to the employee perceptions of the strategy offered insights on how to develop and implement more effective engagement strategies in the future. This chapter will include discussion on the issues of trustworthiness, methodology, the role of the researcher, and research design and rationale. Key members in the organization were the owner, the front-of-the-house employees, and the kitchen employees. The different backgrounds of these people added depth and meaning to the overall study.

Setting

The setting for this study was a small, Midwest business located near Omaha, Nebraska. The setting was relevant in that it provided a microcosm of other similar businesses both in the local community and across the rest of the United States. By previously-mentioned statistics, this location was considered successful but still faced

relevant challenges similar to other like businesses. The selected organization employed approximately 30 people, including the owner. I was specifically approached by the owner to assist in this research venture and offered unfettered access to the organization without influence and with complete impartiality. That fact made this site a tantalizing choice to conduct robust research in an economical way.

Research Design and Rationale

I used an exploratory case study for this research. The research questions reflected both the need to gage leader intent as well as capture employee perception of that intent. The research questions reflected the intent to collect pertinent data and extract meaning from the interview process, triangulated with the subsequent climate survey. The selected research questions were as follows:

RQ1 How do the employees' perceptions of the business's engagement strategy compare with the leader's engagement strategies intent?

RQ2 How do these employee perceptions influence employee attitudes toward work performance?

The central concepts of the phenomenon in this study revolved around Kahn's (1990) theory of personal engagement and disengagement. The phenomenon of employee engagement deals with an employees desired state in the work environment compared to that which they present given organizational climate, perceived fairness, and desired organizational outcomes. Employee engagement phenomenon also encompasses the concepts of work meaningfulness and purpose. In this case study, I developed research questions reflective of both overarching concepts and use employee interviews, the leader

interview, and climate assessment as my research tools. I conducted a climate survey concurrently with interviews identifying employees' perceptions of leader's strategies.

Yin (2014) described qualitative exploratory case study research as having the ability to inquire about the *how* and *why* of a contemporary phenomenon where the researcher could interact with the people involved without manipulating the relevant behaviors. This rich tradition allows the researcher to become the instrument and provides a unique lens to explore and examine a certain phenomenon. The addition of a climate survey, according to Brannen (2017) allowed for triangulation of the phenomenon by using a finely tuned and previously-validated instrument to rigorously scrutinize interview data. Given these two valuable facts, the mixing of these two sources provided the better of two academically proven approaches as I examined the phenomenon.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection (Brannen, 2017). I had an obligation to report reliable and accurate findings. I was also responsible for recognizing and mitigating potential bias in the data collection process. My responsibilities were to listen carefully, develop a rapport with the research participants in order to achieve a level of richness and depth during interviews, and to think critically about the information collected. Additionally, I had an obligation to protect the anonymity of the organization being researched as well as an ethical obligation to protect the confidentiality of the interviewees. I placed member checking procedures in place to mitigate researcher bias.

Methodology

I gave individuals from the selected case site details of the study and then ask for their level of interest in participating. When they indicated they would like to participate, I handed a printed copy of a consent form to them seeking their permission to participate. The study began with face-to-face interviews. At the end of the interviews, each participant received a climate survey to complete. The results of that survey will remain in secure storage for 3 years. I reviewed the consent form and verified the willingness of the participants.

As Yin (2018) discussed, proper interview protocol can provide accuracy and real-world perspective on the research phenomenon. Using semi-structured interviews, I asked participants the same series of questions and the answers to each question was recorded by me in the form of notes as well as by digital recording as approved by each interviewee. During the interview, I verified that the information provided was correct through member checking during the interview. I facilitated this style of member checking during the interview. Restating the data provided and summarizing what the respondents said for accurate interpretation. If there was a mismatch between what the respondent meant and what I interpreted, I sought clarification and asked subquestions to get the correct interpretation of the respondent's meaning. After I conducted the interviews, transcription of the data took place and was then given back to the interviewees for transcript validation; independent from member checking completely.

Participation Selection Logic

The population for this study included employees at all levels of a small, Midwest restaurant business that have more than a week of employment at the business. This ensured the participant had enough familiarity with the organizational climate as well as business goals and expectations. The owner did verify length of employment when I needed to verify if the participant has been on the job for a week. The desired sample population included all employees at each hierarchical interval in the business or until achieving data saturation. My access to this site and familiarity with the employees made purposive sampling the desired sampling strategy. Follow up contact via email occurred next for recruitment. From there, I gained informed consent in written form, and provided a clear explanation of confidentiality and the ability to withdraw from the study at any time. Randomly generated numbers were assigned to participants who agreed to participate in the study.

I found evidence in the climate survey results supporting what Langford (2009) described as the psychometric properties of the *Voice Engagement Survey* (VES). Langford's VES is an employee opinion survey that measures work practices and outcomes. The VES has been tested across more than 13,729 employees from over 1,279 business units representing approximately 1,000 organizations. Dr. Langford used exploratory factor analyses, confirmatory factor analyses, and internal reliability analyses to support 31 lower-order work practices and outcomes. These outcomes combine into seven higher-order work systems. The systems broadly cover practices and outcomes such as organizational direction, resources, involvement, recognition, teamwork,

customer satisfaction, job satisfaction, and the level of organizational commitment.

External validation of this tool was demonstrated by linking scores from the employee

survey with independent manager reports of turnover, absenteeism, productivity, health

and safety, goal attainment, financial performance, change management, innovation, and

customer satisfaction. I used this instrument to bridge the current gap between these

factors and leader intent in conjunction with qualitative interviews.

Instrumentation

For the interview portion of this research process, I was the primary instrument to

collect research data. Semistructured interviews required a detailed schedule or guide

insuring the highest possibility of consistency among interviewees as well as

maximization of everyone's limited time (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). I used Langford's

VES for the climate survey; the tool by which I attempted to triangulate the findings. A

copy of Dr. Langford's permission to use this survey is in Appendix B. The survey

utilized several aspects of elements of employee voice, including wide brushstrokes of

employee engagement and elements of interpretations of organizational outcomes from

the perspective of employees (Langford, 2009). The survey measured the comparison of

employee perceptions of management outcomes with actual intentions of outcomes. The

VES has undergone several developmental iterations and appeared customizable to offer

economy of force for this doctoral research project, given this project's research

questions.

The VES had been used several times since 2003 and is based on a similar

diagnostic model developed by Stone (1998). Given the data scores ranged from 1 to 5,

the resulting responses did tie back into the research questions and I used them to provide

what Rhan (2018) described as an enhanced understanding of the phenomenon I then

entered the responses to the VES into the Voice Project data platform and returned in the

form of their standardized and normed report. I analyzed the data at the individual and

organizational level within the case of this business. I analyzed the results of the VES at

the level of individual employees because all required data was based on employee

perceptions from all of the volunteering employees. Analyses examining the patterns

between employee perception scores and data provided by the manager was conducted at

the overarching business level, examining the bounded case business in its entirety. I

analyzed the subsequent report using the data to triangulate data collected from the

interview process. That analytical process paralleled Langford's original process but

examined the gap between how employees perceive organizational goals compared to

leader intent.

Capturing Leader Intent

In order to compare the employees' perception of a leader's intent, it is necessary

to have the leader's actual intent. To accomplish this, I began by capturing the leader's

comments related to his/her intent. To do this, I asked the leader the same series of

interview questions with the exception that the questions were formulated to capture the

leader's strategic intent of engaging employees. For example, when I asked question one

when asked to the employees it read, "What is it about that company that makes you want

to work here?" To gain the leader's intent, I asked the question, "What is it about your

company that makes people want to work here?" The phrasing of questions for the

employees was shifted during the staff interview. When I interviewed the employees, the question was phrased as, "What is it like to work here;" but when asked to glean the leader's intent, I asked the question, "What do you want it to be like to work here?" Doing so keeps the general integrity of the questions but served to establish a deep understanding of intent that was later be compared to employee perception.

A similar process was implemented with the climate survey portion of the data collection process. The Voice Engagement Survey (VES) instrument in its raw form with stated the defining terms in the opening, highlighted area of the introduction can be found in Appendix C. There, for example, the term *Senior Management* is defined as CEO or Executive Management. I later tailored this baseline survey to meet the needs of this research project. Using this as the foundation of explaining the survey, I was able to explain to the leader that these words describe him/her and will therefore reflect their intent.

Data Collection

There were three sources of data for this study: employee interviews, a leader survey, and the results of the VES. I scheduled data collection to take place at the case site, during times where business was slow. These times occurred on weekdays between 2:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. and on weekends before 11:00 a.m. and after 3:00 p.m. I administered the climate survey via pencil and paper. I entered the results to an online collection site where only I could see the data. The climate assessment only took about 10 minutes and each interview were slated to take 45 minutes to 1 hour but was dependent on the depth of the responses. Collection of the climate survey data took place right after

the interview. I printed out blank surveys and provided to the respondent, so they could fill the survey out for immediate completion after the interview. I then added the data back into the survey website for compilation and organization after the interviews. The interviews were audio recorded and then I transcribed them shortly after each interview session. I saved the digital recordings to an encrypted hard drive for the duration of the study plus five years. If recruitment had yielded too few participants, the use of an alternate site was possible as a backup to provide more participants.

The plan did not require specific debriefing procedures. Should mid-interview internal validity check reveal a mismatch between what the respondent said compared to the interpretation, a follow-up question was asked to ensure clarity between the two in order to ensure the highest possible quality of data. Transcript verification took place via personal email. At the end of the study, each participant received a copy of the study, if requested, and was given a hand-written thankyou note also stating the study has formally concluded. This process automatically exited the participants from the study.

Data Analysis Plan

Given nature of this case study research plan, the study consisted of a set of face-to-face interviews followed by a climate survey conducted concurrently. This section will explain the data analysis plan for each respective section in this exploratory case study.

Interviews

Open-ended interview questions offered a great opportunity to provide depth and richness regarding topic depth, specifically in this case regarding employee perception of management engagement strategies (Weller et al., 2018). Open-ended interview questions

were tailored to get at how these strategies influence employee individual work performance. The selected questions were used to identify employee perceptions of the organizational climate, the findings of which appeared to be predictive of engagement strategies..

I analyzed the interview data by conducting open coding in three coding stages; beginning, middle, and end. Additionally, an open assessment of coding consistency occurred to ensure the quality and credibility of the process as well as the findings (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016). Coding began with a familiarization of the data, where I wrote notes on potential themes in the data. I then utilized buckets to capture initial major themes in the data. The type and amount of these buckets changes as I became more familiar with the data.

I planned to do an analysis of the initial content by finding similar language to group similarities in themes. I placed the rest of the data in coded groups using categorical construction to find other key words and underlying patterns. I used what Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) described as descriptive coding next, to group key words together to find phrases that reoccurring in the data to identify and code common themes. I manually assigned codes to aid in the identification of repeated themes and words (Miles et al., 2014). From complete transcripts, I intended to identify short phrases to link regularities and patterns in the overall data (Miles et al., 2014). Coded buckets aided organization. Each code did accompany researcher notes that acted as a mechanism for later coding transparency. Each bucket was organized to show frequency of the code and had color coding for improved organization.

Climate Survey

The Voice Engagement Survey (VES) tool, pioneered by the Voice Project to assess the organizational climate at the time of the interviews. Dr. Peter Langford of Macquarie University founded the voice project in 2002 to assist organizations to and to find purpose, identify what is important to align goals to ultimately celebrate success. The Voice Engagement Survey uses the 7 Ps model created by Langford (2009) which identifies drivers and outcomes all effecting engagement. Drivers included elements of purpose, participation, peace, property, and people. Outcomes using the model include passion/engagement and progress. Each make up one of the 7 Ps and offered scalability and flexibility with regards to this project.

The Voice Engagement Survey is an adaptable, 127-question survey designed to help managers and employees understand the current work landscape by quantifying elements that affect employee engagement and organizational performance. Based on this new level of understanding provided by the survey that leaders might use to craft an action plan for designed specifically to capitalize on organizational strengths or develop areas of organizational weakness for further development or improvement. I used this survey to identify and match potential areas where organizational climate could predict alignment between management's strategies and employee's perceptions. The survey contained 110 benchmark questions, three open-ended questions, and 14 demographic-related questions. The design of the survey was one in which the standard benchmark questions could be provided to respondents as written or tailorable to the specific needs of this research project. The scaling of the survey responses ranged from *0* to *5*. The *0*

value indicates the respondent *does not know* or the question *is not applicable*. Ranges *1*

thru *5* indicate *strongly disagree* up to *strongly agree*, respectively. I tailored the climate

survey, listed in Appendix C, to meet the requirements of this study to clarify the

interview question. The tailored survey that was offered to all employees is loaded in

Appendix E.

The *Voice Project* survey site on the Internet was the location where data input for

the climate survey portion of the project occurred. The site was located at the URL of

www.voiceproject.com/surveys/employee_engagement. I manually inputted the

respondents' data provided at the conclusion of each interview. The site was secured, the

data was confidential, and I had sole access. The results of the survey were accessible

with permission and visually displayed in a color coded, percentage format. Using

Langford's (2009) 7 Ps model of work practices outcomes, each response provided a

strength rating pertaining to the inventory of other elements in that engagement-related

area. This feature allowed me to examine the data in bulk areas and glean details about

specific, main functions of the overall case where strengths and weaknesses were

potentially present. The Voice Project marked its debut as a research program at

Macquarie University, designed to explore the impact that employee voice had on

engagement, leadership, and organizational outcomes.

The Voice Project the organization allowed me to use their climate survey,

performed the task of data compilation. I triangulated the data by examining areas within

the survey that overlap to main themes that emerged in the qualitative interview. A

significant response in the climate survey category that that shared a common theme with

the interviews indicated that the organizational climate was an indicator of alignment between leader strategy and employee perception.

Threats to Validity

Internal Validity

A sound research design is critical to ensuring internal validity (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011). In a qualitative study, internal validity relates to credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To counter internal threats to credibility (Yin, 2014, p. 105), I used multiple data sources to include the VES climate survey along with interviews of two groups, the employees, and the leadership. The selected VES tools consisted of normed questions that have been developed by Stone (1998). Finally, there is no data collection limitation regarding the case and the researcher was provided unhindered access to the research site and participants.

External Validity

Ihantola and Kihn (2011) stated that external validity stems from the overall conclusion derived from the data that could be used to relate to other samples, locations, and time periods. As addressed in the design rationale of this research project, the sampling intent was to recruit as many participants from the small business identified in order to accurately reflect the entire case population. Sampling as many participants as possible, close to the total population size ensured population validity. Further discussion on generalization is covered in depth later in this paper.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Polit and Beck (2016) defined credibility as the truth of the data through the lens of the respondents' interpretation or perspective combined with the researcher's explanation of these interpretations and perceptions. Furthermore, credibility is enhanced by the researcher describing his or her experiences as a researcher and verifying the research findings with the participants. Credibility is critical in doctoral research. To ensure credibility, I triangulated interview results through with member checking and literature comparisons to ensure proper interpretation of the data. The interview portion of the data collection occurred first, followed by the analysis of VES survey data. Doing so minimized researcher bias and offered a proven, structured lens by which the qualitative data could be interpreted.

Transferability

Transferability in data collection is the ability of findings to become generalized beyond that of the specific research case (Holloway & Galvin, 2017). Yin (2018) also characterized elements of transferability in qualitative data particularly, to other situations and circumstances that may not occur directly to a larger population. This study examined the responses of employees at all levels of management within the specific small business case. Age, experience, race, employment history, and other factors did not limit participation in this study. The planned use of data triangulation in this study provided additional outside validity. The possibility was likely with this research endeavor, as with many examples of qualitative research, that specific transferability

might not be assured until after the research has concluded (Yin, 2018). I ensured that data collected fit strict context of this particular case to guard against threats to transferability.

Dependability

Zhang and Wildemuth (2016) defined dependability as the steps in a process researcher's use to ensure quality given the changing conditions within the study phenomenon. On major technique for ensuring dependability is using audits utilized to check findings against the interpretation and recommendations (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016). With regards to this research project, I maintained strict and detailed audit checks against data interpretation that clearly outlined links in logic as they compare to findings in previous research. Finally, I conducted three stages of coding, concluding with an open assessment of the coding strategy in order to strengthen the resulting findings (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016).

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the process by which the researcher can assure that qualitative data was collected and subsequently analyzed in a way that prevents distortion and bias by analyzing respondents' expressions for meaning within a specific context (Given, 2008). As stated in a previous section, the use of an audit trail mechanism demonstrated the connections in researcher logic based on consistent findings. Verification processes such as member checking were useful in ensuring the validity of the findings in research and was planned for within this research project.

Ethical Procedures and Informed Consent

Data collected for this study had the oversight of Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB's purpose was to ensure the study complied with ethical standards of the research and the ethical treatment of the participants. I used an informed consent form, provided to the research participants, and required each to sign the forum prior to the start of the interview. . Participants were given two days to review the form prior to being interviewed. I informed participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time if they become uncomfortable and could elect to remove themselves from the study at any time by notifying me via phone call, text message, or email. No incentives were provided to secure. I offered a transcribed copy of each participants' interview at the interviewees' request.

Confidentiality and Data Security

To protect anonymity and the confidentiality of the organization and participants in this study, I assigned a pseudonym to the business in addition to assigning identification numbers to participants. The list of identification numbers with corresponding names remained in a spreadsheet, stored in an encrypted external hard drive that only I can access. I shredded this spreadsheet at the conclusion of data collection. On the encrypted hard drive, the unique identification number served as the name of that respondent's data file folder. I will maintain the secured folder containing the audio voice files, survey data if applicable, and the interview transcript. I will sustain the recorded data for a four-year timeframe following the study before destruction. I will store all data on the encrypted external hard drive and store that hard

drive in a locked safe. I shredded all paperwork after transcription to protect the identity of both the organization and the participants.

Summary

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to explore the alignment or misalignment of employee perceptions of, and the leader's intent of, engagement strategies. The exploration occurred from the viewpoint of the employees of a small, Midwest business. The intent of this study was to uncover employees' perceptions of the strategies and how consistent they are with the intent of the business owner. The results from face-to-face interviews were compared to the results of a climate survey. This chapter included discussion on the issues of trustworthiness, methodology, the role of the researcher, and research design and rationale. The results obtained when comparing a leader's strategic intent to the employee perceptions of the strategy offer insights on how to develop and implement more effective engagement strategies in the future.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to explore the alignment or misalignment of employee perceptions and the leader's intent of employee engagement strategies. I compared the results from face-to-face interviews to the results of a climate survey. The climate survey assisted in data triangulation and I administered it to evaluate the climate of the organization to determine if the current organizational climate was consistent with the match or mismatch of employee perceptions and engagement. I selected the following research questions:

RQ1: How do the employees' perceptions of the business's engagement strategy compare with the leader's engagement strategies intent?

RQ2: How do these employee perceptions influence employee attitudes toward work performance?

This chapter begins with a presentation of the research setting, explanation of the participant demographics, and a description of how the data were collected in this research study. Following these sections, I presented the data analysis to each participant individually.   followed by evidence for trustworthiness. This chapter concludes with a detailed look at the study results.

Research Setting

I collected data for this case study by conducting face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with 17 staff members of a local, small restaurant business. Each interview was followed by the participants volunteering to take a climate survey. I then triangulated the results of the interviews with results of the survey. I then identified potential

participants by the criterion of being part of the organization and being employed at the

location for no less than one week. I then contacted each of the qualifying participant via

email or in person to verify their willingness to participate in the study, requiring a 45-

minute interview followed by a 10-minute survey. I conducted each interview in a private

location within the site at various times during business hours. I recorded each interview

using a digital, hand-held audio recorder. Each participant understood and signed a

confidentiality agreement. All participants appeared to offer candid replies, indicating a

free and open expression of their feelings regarding the interview questions.

Data Collection

I collected data on all 17 eligible participants under IRB approval # 02-07-19-

0505425. The data collection process consisted of a face-to-face, audio recorded

interview forecasted to take 45 minutes. Most interviews lasted around 30 minutes.

Interviews were followed immediately by the administration of a survey estimated to take

10 minutes but averaged 12 minutes to complete. I collected the interviews and survey

data in an isolated section of the case business to ensure participant privacy. I recorder

the interviews with a digital voice recorder. In addition to the recording, I took field notes

to capture non-verbal cues and other levels of data richness, unable to be gleaned from an

audio-only recording. Each set of the field notes were labeled with the individual's

unique and random participant number. I pre-coded the surveys with the unique, random

participant identification number prior to distribution, ensuring that the survey and filed

notes matched only one participant. I gave detailed instructions to each respondent orally.

I targeted data collection periods for times where the business was closed to the public or where the business has been typically less busy. I was able to collect most of the data between busy meal. This resulted in a handful of occasions where staff participants requested a pause in data collection to see to customers' needs. Notably, data saturation appeared to occur by the third interview; however, all 17 participants were interviewed.

Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of a four-step process using inductive coding. Inductive coding was selected as the most appropriate coding technique based on Saldaña's (2016) description where the researcher knows very little regarding the phenomenon and exploration prior to conducting the interviews. The data were analyzed using a four step process of *data familiarization, open coding, theme construction*, and *theme consolidation*. A graphical depiction that shows the process from code identification thru theme consolidation can be found in Appendix F.

Data analysis began with *data familiarization* began with the review of field notes and journal entries to identify potential preliminary codes. Once transcription of the voice data was complete, I conducted the initial analysis. Once analyzed and checked, transcript verification was accomplished with each participant to assure accuracy . Once each section of the transcript was checked for common errors like grammar, the section was stripped of the unique identification number and sent to the participant via email for verification. No major errors were found by the interview participants and all transcripts were verified prior to the expiration of the time limit.

After the voice files were transcribed, data familiarization continued, and I shifted to the next step of *open coding*. I found that my field notes were helpful in getting me to the correct spot in the transcript so where the rich data was used to develop emerging codes. I was able to begin a surface-level examination of the data in order to identify fine-grain details regarding the codes I began discovering. Codes that emerged often were annotated in the margins of my field notes. From the margins, I was then able to locate the precise location within the transcript where the code emerged. Codes were given unique color codes that helped organize and tally the overall frequency of code occurrence. Now, working from the generalized words from the field notes, I moved to more fine-grain details from the transcript. Although valuable on their own, being able to have a code marker that led me back to the specific portion within the entire transcript led me quickly and directly to the participant's quote. These richer comments highlighted something more overarching than just the code and alerted me to the need for more scrutiny in theme development. As the transcript revealed more and more key words from the interview, I then began grouping these key words together for the next step of the analysis process.

The next step in the data analysis process was *theme construction*. Before I could begin the transition to constructing larger themes from the smaller-level codes, I needed to do a deep dive into the remaining data. In constructing the larger theme makeup, I needed to scrutinize the smaller code groups for commonality within the context of the entire data set. As I began grouping similar codes together, I began seeing themes that linked the codes together. Although the codes were similar, they were not all exactly the

same. To bridge this gap, I began constructing themes that acted as a bridge that linked all similar codes together.

The last phase of data analysis, *theme consolidation*, required that I had all the data coded correctly and organized efficiently from the previous steps. In this step, I reviewed the research question to determine if the data was relevant regarding the study of the phenomenon. Using the research questions, began by comparing leader intent regarding the theme with the actual themes that emerged from the employees' data. I began the process of answering the first research questions by breaking it into two parts; leader intent and employee perception. Based on the research question, I was able to finish grouping codes into themes pertinent to the study. Themes outside the scope of the study were removed while themes pertaining to the research question remained for further consolidation.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility can be defined as the reality-based truth from the data viewed through the lens of the respondents' interpretation or perspective, combined with the researcher's explanation of these interpretations and perceptions (Polit & Beck, 2016). Credibility is enhanced by the process in which the researcher describes his or her experiences as a researcher and verifying the research findings with the participants. Credibility is often considered the first criterion and is critical to the integrity of doctoral research. To ensure credibility in this project, I implemented mid-interview member checking combined with triangulation to ensure proper interpretation and recording of the data occurred. In this

project, the interview portion of the data collection occurred first with analysis of that data occurring before comparison of the survey instrument. By doing this, I was able to minimize researcher bias and offer a proven, structured lens by which the survey data was interpreted.

Transferability

Holloway and Galvin (2017) defined transferability in data collection as the ability of findings to become generalized beyond that of the specific research case. Yin (2018) also characterized elements of transferability, in qualitative data particularly, to other situations and circumstances that may not occur directly to a larger population. In this study I examined the responses of employees at all levels of management within the specific small business case. As a direct byproduct of this examination, age, experience, race, employment history, and other similar factors did not limit participation in this study. I used data triangulation in this study to provide additional outside validity. Using what Denzin (1978) and Patton (2002) identified as data source triangulation, I used three sources of data consisting of employee interview data, leader interview data, and the results of a climate survey called *The Voice Engagement Survey*. The possibility is likely with this research endeavor, as with many examples of qualitative research, that specific transferability may not be assured until after the formal research project has concluded (Yin, 2018). I ensured that data collected fit the strict context of this particular case as a safeguard against threats to transferability.

Dependability

Zhang and Wildemuth (2016) defined dependability as the steps used in the researcher's process to ensure quality in light of the changing conditions within the study phenomenon. On major technique for ensuring dependability is using audits utilized to check findings against the interpretation and recommendations (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016). With regard to this research project, I maintained strict and detailed audit checks against data interpretation that clearly outlined links in logic as they compared to findings in previous research. Additionally, I conducted three stages of coding, concluding with an open assessment of the coding strategy in order to strengthen interview findings, as suggested by Zhang and Wildemuth (2016).

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the process by which the researcher can assure that qualitative data was collected and subsequently analyzed in a way that prevents distortion and bias by analyzing respondents' expressions for meaning within a specific context (Given, 2008). As stated, prior in previous sections, the use of an audit trail mechanism demonstrated the connections in researcher logic based on consistent findings. The verification processes, or transcript verification, was the method used to ensure the validity of the findings in this research project. Specifically, individual transcript verification helped verify the existence of overarching themes in the study facilitated by asking probing questions.

Study Results

The study results are presented in tandem with the appropriate research question.. In the first two sections, I will speak to what RQ1 asks, regarding how employees perceive the leader's engagement strategy. Answering RQ1 required that the themes first be broken down by (a) leader intent and (b) employee perceptions. In the third section, I will cover themes that answer RQ2, examining the perceived intent and how that perception effects the employee's attitudes toward work performance.

RQ 1: Leader Engagement Strategy and Employee Perception of that Strategy

The results of the data collected for RQ1 were broken down into two sections. The first section is the leader intent for strategic engagement strategies. The employees' perception of the leader's intent are presented in the second section.

Leader intent. Data regarding leader intent fell into three major themes. The major themes regarding leader intent can be found in Table 1. Several codes aided in theme development as data analysis progressed. Themes, codes, and the accompanying transcript excerpts can be found in Table 2. A comprehensive code book, including frequencies, can be found in Appendix H for leader intent. Appendix I represents the code book for employee perception.

Table 1. *Major Themes Regarding Leader Intent*

	Major Themes
Theme 1	Family-feel and Mom and Pop Business Environment
Theme 2	Fun and Rewarding Work and Social Environments
Theme 3	Team Cohesion and the Effect of Personal Issues

Theme 1: Family-feel and mom and pop business environment. The owner's

engagement strategy intent was to run a mom and pop-type business rather than a corporate model. The owner indicated that they wanted to run an operation that was devoid of the burdensome corporate inefficiencies in place of an easy-going establishment that is fun. With regards to what aspects of the company entice people to work there, the owner, Participant 1 stated, "The fact that it's a mom and pop operation. It's not a bunch of corporate BS. Easy going and you get all major holidays off."

In line with this finding, the owner stated that they did not like to be called by the title boss. Instead, the owner preferred to be called by their first name, indicating that it created more comradery and a sense of togetherness. The owner, Participant 1 stated, "I explained many times to most of them I don't like being called boss. I like being called [owner's first name] for the sole reason that our success, it means we've worked together. We're coworkers." The owner, Participant 1 continued, "I can't do my job if they don't do theirs and they can't do their job if I don't do mine. We're all in it together." This mom and pop or family mentality was a reoccurring theme in this study, linking the work atmosphere to that of a family dynamic.

Theme 2: Fun and rewarding work and social environments. The owner's intent was to create happy customers and happy employees, also aligning with the desire to run a fun working location and overall successful establishment. The owner, Participant 1 stated, "You want to have fun. People want to have fun at work. They don't want to dread going to work." The owner, Participant 1 also stated that, "I do like to see happy coworkers and happy customers."

The owner also stated that the strategies were incentivize to promote outstanding performance through the administration of merit-based raises and bonuses. The owner stated that his/her intent was to promote and encourage suggestions and outstanding, unprompted service through increases in pay. Specifically, the owner, Participant 1 stated that they motivate employees through the use of random bonuses for suggestions that get incorporated into the formal menu. The owner, Participant 1 stated, "And of course their uh, their, um, pay is based off of performance. So raises merit raises." The owner went on to clarify that pay incentives were based on, "Job performance. They will get random bonuses when I see him do something really crazy good and without being asked or if they bring suggestions, suggestions that are implemented."

The owner related that he/she did not see much motivation outside of what was intrinsic. The owner, Participant 1 captured this by stating, "It's difficult for me; It's inherent. It's a job and you do your best. You try to be the best at every task can do." In fact, the owner was unable to expand on aspects that would currently motivate the staff, articulating the shift from his/her own intrinsic motivation to ways to motivate the staff by explaining (P 1):

> It's difficult. Um…Because I work… Because I work my job that I do… it's all pride, little bit of ego in there. I want to do better and I want to be the best. As for them? I got to figure out a way to instill that into them" (P1)

The owner's strategy was to look at employment as a job in which you should do your best. This intrinsic aspect of doing the best at every task taken on is internal to the owner.

The owner stated that they were unable to address how to instill that motivation in the employees.

More themes emerged that tie back into the idea of facilitating a *fun* atmosphere. When asked about available non-monetary rewards, the owner indicated the desire to hold more outings and team functions. When asked, excluding money, what would motivate the staff, P1 stated, "The only thing I could think of would be more outings or team functions." The owner was able to clearly articulate that when money is removed from the employment equation, the only thing left is wanting people to have fun. Pt 1 said, "If you take money out of the equation, what else is there? You want to have fun. People want to have fun at work. They don't want to dread going to work. But there's a very fine line already." From a thematic stance, the notion of fostering a fun work environment was reinforced further with the notion that the owner deliberately intends to create an environment where the employees don't want to dread going to work and that he/she intends that they want to have fun.

Theme 3: Team cohesion and the effect of personal issues. The final major theme that emerged regarding leader intent surrounded the desire to create an environment where personal issues are kept from entering the business environment. The owner cited examples where employee attitudes as a result of events that occurred in ones' personal life, tended to be carried in to their work environment. This was articulated by Participant 1's statement:

> You, definitely have people that are excited to go and be productive, make
>
> money, [and] entertained customers. And then you have the one downer that's just

there 'Oh my God, I got to hang over.' 'Something's going on with my boyfriend or girlfriend at home,' when I just don't want to be here. And that attitude destroys the morale. You're supposed to leave all your personal issues at the door before you come in, but a lot of people can't do that (P1).

The owner, Participant 1 went on to offer a specific example of this phenomenon in the statement:

Great example. [Employee name] and I are pretty good friends and we've had, um, we've had more than one heated disagreement outside of work about something at work. Probably won't get back in the workplace; we put all that aside and go back to doing what we're supposed to do. Most people don't, or don't have that ability, or choose not to manifest it (P1).

To further team cohesion, the owner offered examples where they make ongoing attempt to communicate and convey respect for the staff. The owner, Participant 1 offered that, "I guess I'm out of touch with them as hard as I try to communicate and show them that I respect them" (P1). The response clearly indicated intent to act justly but expressed a feeling of lacking relevance and lacking a connection by ending the interview with the statement, "I've just lost touch with them if I ever had it" (P1).

Is pTable 2.

Leader Intent Themes and Coding

Interview Excerpts	Theme	Code
"The fact that it's a mom and pop operation. It's not a bunch of corporate [expletive]" (P1).	Mom and pop	Environment
"Easy going and you get all major holidays off" (P1).	Fun atmosphere	Environment
"I do like to see happy coworkers, and happy customers" (P1).	Fun atmosphere	Environment
"[Their] pay is based off of performance. They will get random bonuses when I see him do something really crazy good and without being asked" (P1).	Rewards	Communication/ Leadership
"When it's busy, it's very rewarding" (P1).	Rewards	Environment
"More outings or team functions. If you take money out of the equation, what else is there" (P1)?	Outings & team functions/ Team cohesion	Environment
"You want to have fun. People want to have fun at work. They don't want to dread going to work" (P1).	Fun atmosphere	Environment
"They just don't want to be here. And that attitude destroys the morale. You're supposed to leave all your personal issues at the door before you come in, but a lot of people can't do that" (P1).	Personal issues/ Team cohesion	Environment
"I'm out of touch with them. As hard as I try to communicate and show them that I respect them, I've just lost touch with them if I ever had it" (P1).	Communication and respect	Leadership
		(continued)

Table 3 (continued).

"Motivate them to do a good job? It's difficult for me; It's inherent. How do I give them that	Communication and respect	Leadership

motivation? I have no idea… got to figure out a way to instill that into them" (P1).		
"They're [employees] are a huge part [of the team]. We're all in it together" (P1).	Mom and pop/ Team cohesion	Environment

The concluding themes that emerged from assessing leader intent surround communication, leadership style, and environment. From that assessment, the business leader/owner strives to run a *mom and pop* operation, opposite of a corporate entity, where the team functions as one unit. The owner intends to have a fun environment where employees want to come to work, driving happier employees and, in turn, happy customers. Also, the owner enjoys a lack of formality with their employee, exemplified by the desired use of their first name over the title *boss.* In an interesting dichotomy, that informality tends to creep into the formal work environment from off-site teambuilding events; a problematic situation for management after the event. However, the owner intends to continue team functions and outings as they built a sense of teamwork and facilitates bonding.

The owner feels that a busy pace leads to better team rewards but the influence for employees to do a good job in work tasks is lacking. To counter this, the business leader intends to utilize random bonuses for outstanding performances in conjunction to merit-based raises. The owner intends for their employees to do the very best they can, but it remained unclear from the data as to the degree the leader was modeling that behavior to the employee workforce. Finally, the leader intends to limit outside personal dynamics within the work environment, citing that these negative, often dramatic attitudes destroy

morale. Ultimately, the owner admits that their intent is to show and communicate

respect but expresses that they may have lost touch with employees.

Voice Engagement Survey against leader intent. Using the results of the Voice

Engagement Survey (VES), a climate survey designed to aid in triangulation as another

lens to measure leader intent, similar codes emerged that fall into the same theme groups.

Figure 1 is used to graphically demonstrates the scoring disposition of the results of the

VES compared to VES code. There were many factors in the VES that ended up not

being pertinent to answering the research questions. Out of the remaining VES

categories, pertinent codes did emerge that fit into the establish interview themes. Table 3

outlines the Climate Survey (VES) triangulation results regarding the scoring of leader

intent.
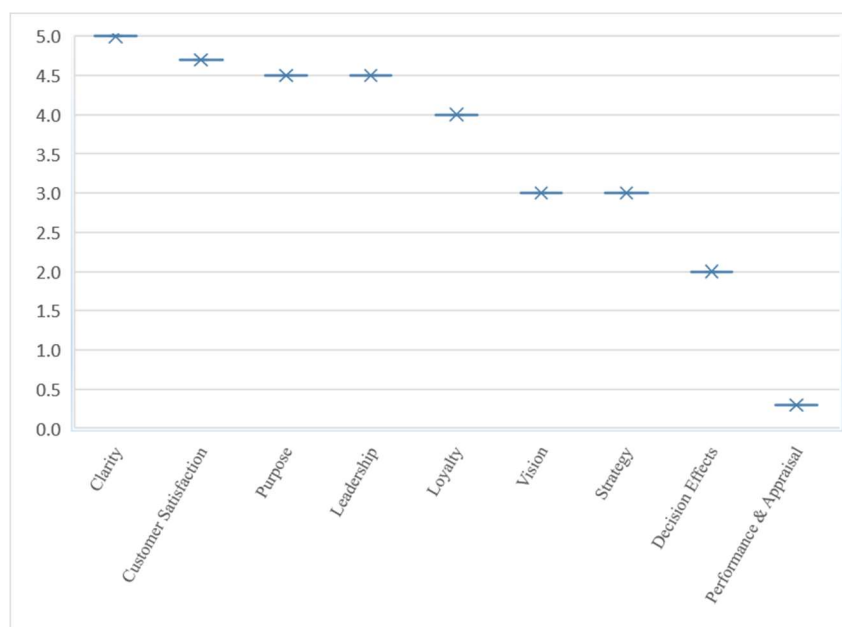
Figure 1. Graphically-demonstrated scoring disposition of the results of the Climate
Survey (VES). The Climate Survey is scored 1 thru 5, with 1 being "strongly disagree," 3
being "neutral" or "mixed feelings", and 5 meaning "strongly agree." A score of 0
indicates "N/A" or "I don't know."

Table 4.

VES Triangulation, Codes, Scoring, and Themes

VES Code	Score	Code	Theme
Values	5.0	Leadership	Family-feel and Mom and Pop Business
Clarity (of goals and objectives)	5.0	Communication	Family-feel and Mom and Pop Business
Customer Satisfaction	4.7	Environment	Fun and Rewarding Work and Social Environment
Purpose (of the organization)	4.5	Leadership	Team Cohesion and the Effect of Personal Issues
Leadership (confidence in, listening to employees, informing employees, role model for employees)	4.5	Leadership	Family-feel and Mom and Pop Business Environment
Loyalty (to the leader)	4.0	Leadership	Team Cohesion and the Effect of Personal Issues
Vision (of the organization)	3.0	Communication	Family-feel and Mom and Pop Business
Strategy (of the leader/business)	3.0	Communication	Fun and Rewarding Work and Social Environment
Decision Effects (on the team)	2.0	Communication	Team Cohesion and the Effect of Personal Issues
Performance & Appraisal	0.3	Leadership	Fun and Rewarding Work and Social Environment

Note. VES is scored 1 thru 5, with 1 being "strongly disagree," 3 being "neutral" or "mixed feelings", and 5 meaning "strongly agree." A score of 0 indicates "N/A" or "I don't know."

Employee perception of leader intent. This section brings to light the

employees' perceptions of the leader's strategic intent with regards to how employees

perceive that they are being led by the owner. This section is grouped according to the four major themes that emerges and finish out the data analysis for RQ1. Those themes are organizational climate, personal pride, belief in product, and desire for success. Table 4 identifies these themes with the corresponding subthemes that emerged. Appendix G displays the process of theme consolidation beginning with code genesis moving forward. Table 5.

Major Themes and Subthemes Regarding Employee Perception of Leader Intent

	Major Themes	Subthemes
Theme 1	Organizational Climate	Family
		Mom & Pop
		Fun
		Leadership & Pace
		Micromanagement
		Team & Attitudes
Theme 2	Personal Pride	In Work Tasks
		From External Sources
Theme 3	Belief in Product	Part of Business Identity
		Product Reputation
Theme 4	Desire for Success	Individual/Team Success
		Organizational Success

Shifting focus over to the interviews of the employees, analysis if the data that came from the interview allow for an assessment of the employee perception of how the leader intends to engage their workforce. Employee perceptions fall into four specific themes. The four themes I will examine that capture employee perception are *organizational climate, personal pride, belief in the product,* and *desire for success.* This section will serve to identify key elements in how employees perceive the overarching engagement strategy.

Theme 1: Organizational Climate. The climate within an organization can be measured in many ways. Within the bounds of this case study, I discovered several qualities that helped me assess the overall climate within my chosen case site. The first aspect was the widest spread across each interview. Almost every employee I interviewed stated that the staff and coworkers felt to them like *family*. When the word family was not used, a similar construct description emerged likening the business to *mom and pop*. This orientations to their work location lead to feelings of togetherness and cohesion among everyone working there.

From the interview data, the word *family* emerged 13 times in interview responses referencing the work atmosphere. When *family* was not offered as a description, the word *mom and pop* was used, referencing a small-scale, often family-owned business. The description *mom and pop* was used 10 times in the interviews. Examples of these uses include, "You know, [owner] motivates you. He makes you feel like a part of the place of business. Trying to be a part of a, like a mom and pop company" (P17). Participant 9 also characterized this phenomenon by stating, "I really enjoy the whole mom and pop situation. Um, I used to work in a mom and pop restaurant, and I went to corporations and it's just not even close to the same."

Regarding the aspect of *family*, ubiquitous examples include Participant 2, who stated, "Um, we're like a family and we're all really good friends and like I feel like all of us would do anything for each other." Participant 2's response was similar to the others, including Participant 12 that summarized the family aspect by stating, "Um, I like that it's

a family owned company. I like that there seems to be genuine passion for the product or the company, but there's some actual heart behind it."

The *mom and pop* or *family* description of the organization was not without an interesting counterbalance. Of the 13 respondents that referenced *family* in their description of the business atmosphere, four respondents added the description of *dysfunction* as a qualifier at some point in their comments. When exploring this dysfunctional dynamic of the family environment, I found that the dysfunction was seen as a byproduct of the closeness among the staff within the business. The employees did not always view this as negative, just as a less-than-desirable characteristic found in many family units. The acknowledgement and acceptance of this dysfunction was articulated succinctly by Participant 12 in the statement that, "It's [the business] a dysfunctional family, but yes, that's important to me," and by Participant 15 who described the work environment by saying, "Oh, uh, it's a lot like being small. It is a lot like a family and as families are, sometimes there's dysfunction. So, with the size being the way it is, any dysfunction is amplified."

One final description offered by respondents described the work environment as *fun*. The adjective *fun* was used 20 times across the interview process. Participant 7 stated, "It seems like a fun place," and that, "working here is fun." Participant 4 mentioned that "My coworkers are fun and it's a job that I know well." The description of the work environment as *fun* was also not without some interesting counterbalancing qualifiers. Participant 4 offered an additional mentioning of the fun environment with one of these interesting qualifiers, stating, "At times it's really fun and lucrative. At other

times hostile and stressful." The theme of stress also emerged in Participant 6, when they stated, "Everybody likes each other for the most part. I mean it gets stressful sometimes, you know, but everybody's pretty good at keeping themselves in check." These were the first examples of stress in the work environment that began to emerge in the study.

The next area within the organizational climate construct that induced stress on employees came from developing themes regarding *leadership* and *pace* that directly affected employee happiness. From data collected from employees, I discovered that the word *micromanaged* was used 11 times to describe the owner. Of the 11 examples the notable ones include Participant 17's comments:

Like I said, just let me do my job. Um, I mean micromanagement is always going to be a problem no matter where you work, and in this place seems to be worse than that than most places I've ever worked at.

Participant 20 commented, "I really don't like to be micromanaged. Sometimes [owner] comes up in the line, he starts nitpicking little things that I'm doing and I'm like, 'There's a method to my madness.'" Participant 4 describes the same phenomenon but adds the element of feeling uncomfortable to that of feeling hindered:

I would like to see [owner] stop micromanaging us. He has to trust us as he's hired us to do so, to do our jobs and be able to do said jobs without him over your shoulder. It makes me feel uncomfortable.

It appears that the employees of business feel as if they desire a little more autonomy in their work roles and that the level of *micromanagement* is hindering their ability to be creative and to provide advanced levels of customer service from the data. It

appears that the owner views idle time in the business an unproductive and may be attempting to maximize productivity during these idle times. As a result, the data suggests that employees feel like someone is always watching them and they will be made to feel uncomfortable in work roles as well as not as able to interact with customers as a result. Participant 4 offers an account of this by stating, "However, you feel like leadership is focusing too much on micromanaging and the little things, rather than building a bigger picture on customer/clientele experience return." Participant 3 also stated, "You should be able to trust your employees a bit more than just nitpicking on them every single day. Micromanaging. That's probably the one thing that probably gets under everybody's skin but mostly is the constant micromanaging."

The final major themes that emerged regarding organizational environment revolve around the themes of *team* and *attitudes*. For *team*, I grouped responses together when they involved elements of team makeup, cohesion, and support. *Attitude* was similarly grouped together when the theme involved attitudes, effect on others, to include customers, and the overall impact of attitude on the work environment. From the data, two noticeable traits emerged. First, one team member's attitude could ruin the mood of an entire shift. Second, employees feel that a team member's attitude directly correlates to the quality of the product provided, to include the level of customer service and satisfaction. These themes are represented in the responses of Participant 20 who stated, "Uh, some days it's great depending on who's working together, it can be great, but there are those few people who like to come in with a negative attitude all the time. That affects everybody" and Participant 19 that said, "So, I think when you're happy, it is

infectious." Participant 15 summarized my assertion with the statement of, "Happy cook, happy food. Happy server, happy customers."

Participant 15 explained their rational for this phenomenon by explaining that the small business atmosphere tends to exacerbate the undesired effects of negative attitudes because of the smaller size of the employee pool and the relative closeness of the business environment. This rationale is expressed by Participant 15 in the statement:

I think that's one thing, since it's very small, there is a lot of uh, you know, um, the inner interpersonal relationships are very much more affected by, one another. It's not like you can go to another area and just like, you know, avoid somebody, you know?

Participant 15 summarized the potential negative effects one person's mood may have on the rest of the crew and the quality of the product served by stating, "So, the biggest thing is like, uh, who you working with that day and it really affects everybody's mood and then to extend it to the product that's being made and served."

To summarize the organizational climate of this case, the business environment is heavily dependent on the pace of business. Slower days lead to less earnings for the crew and business. Slower days also lead to a lot of idle time that the owner would like to see being taken up by cleaning or other rudimentary tasks. These tasks are often viewed as menial by the employees. Additionally, these tasks are viewed by employees as the owner micromanaging the team rather than offering efficient suggestions to occupy their idle time. The mom and pop nature of the business is appealing to the employees. The sense of family that the employees feel is a result of their familiarity with the owner and

the loyalty that many of them they feel toward the owner and their belief in the quality of their product. Finally, employee attitudes play a big part in overall team cohesion as well as how these attitudes can affect customer service and satisfaction.

   Theme 2: Personal pride. The theme of personal pride was summarized from the interview data using sub themes of how pride manifested in work and how sources of pride originated from external sources and experiences. As a description of how pride manifests in the work environment, one key area of the interview protocol was helpful. When asked what kind of things make you want to do a good job, Participant 17 succinctly stated, "Uh, pride man." Participant 4 answered the same question with emphasis on internal pride in the statement, "And then obviously there's a sense of internal pride about doing a good job. I'll feel like [expletive] when I do a really bad job. When asked the same question, Participant 20 brought to light the first of many examples where pride was learned from a source external to the organization. Participant 20 stated, "Me taking pride in my own work. I always striving for the best and…Um, that's just how I was raised. If you are going to do something, do it right. I know that's not how everybody is."

   Participant 15 expanded on the source of pride as being external in origin to the organization stating:

   Uh, well that's just personal pride and…'cause whatever I do, I want to make

   sure I do it 'cause that's just come from, you know, not doing so well in

   school. I made a little promise to myself, you know, I was like, 'I'll just do

   whatever I do and try to do the best.' But uh, again I just have to tie it back

into the product and like it's a sense of pride to put that food in the window

or serve the food and make it look best and just make people happy.

Participant 12 used the word pride in a similar way, illustrating that it was

something they brought in to the organization form an external source. When asked for

their motivation for working at the case site, Participant 12 stated, "So, it's always been

extremely important to me when I have that type of job that I actually have some pride in

what I'm bringing out to the table, if that makes sense."

Theme 3: Belief in product. The theme of belief in the product was summarized

from the interview data in two ways. The first way had to do with how the product tied

into the identity to the business and the second dealt with the employees maintaining the

reputation of the product through quality control as it is being served to customers. When

describing the general work atmosphere, Participant 3 tied the concept to the product to

part of the organization's identity by stating, "[The] atmosphere is good, we got a good

product. Also, I do believe in our product and I think it's definitely one of the best burgers

around here." Participant 12 identified an allegiance to the product by tying in their

perceived role within the organization. When asked what it was that makes them want to

work at the case site, Participant 12 stated:

I like that there seems to be genuine passion for the product or the company, but

there's some actual heart behind it. Um, in this particular industry, even though it's not

my product per se, I'm the face of it and I am the go-to between what we have and, and

the public.

Participant 12 said later in summary at the end of the interview that, "and like I

said, the product is a great product."

Following the subtheme of how the product being served ties into the organization's identity, the second subtheme I identified related to the employees maintaining the reputation of the product via quality control when product is being served to guests. As an example, when asked about motivation, Participant 15 stated:

Uh, the product. Uh, okay. Uh, it was, uh, you know, it's not a big chain, you know, but, uh, at the end of the day I'm able to prep the food, make the food, serve the food so I could see the whole process. And it's a very good product.

Participant 3 echoed this sentiment by stating that, "It's about putting out the best product possible, with what you're given."

Theme 4: Desire for success. The theme of desire for success was summarized from the interview data in two ways. The first way success emerged from the data involved individual/team success. The second way success precipitated from the data had to do to success as it related to the overall business. The theme of success also emerged by other uses of words similar to failure prevention.

Regarding individual/team success, Participant 4 stated that their desire for success came from how they were raised. Participant 4 said that they were taught by a parent that, "Your own best reward is being successful." Participant 20 commented, "I make sure all the little things are done that I guess irks them, uh, would be the best way to put that." Participant 20 continued commenting on individual/team success by stating, "Like just little things that don't get done set and everybody else up. Like, um, making sure the line's stocked and you know, making sure I'm not leaving them with nothing."

Participant 20 summarized by saying, "Try not to set them up for failure."

Regarding the overall business' success, Participant 12 identified with organizational success. When asked how they contribute to the business, Participant 12 mention success in a reply, "Um, I really care about [business's] success, so when I come to work, I'm not just there to get from the beginning to the end of the shift." Participant 17 encapsulated both the individual/team success with the overall business's success. Participant 17 began with:

We're both trying to get to the same place. We both want this place to be successful. [Owner] wants it successful and so do we. 'Cause the more successful as places is, the more money he makes, the more money you make so you got to understand that what we're doing is to make it this the best place it could possibly be.

Later in the interview, Participant 17 expanded their remarks:

My motivation, I want to be successful. For me it's like I'm self-motivated and have an opportunity to be in a business like this where it's not a place it's going to run itself because of the national ad or a Super bowl spot or anything like that where it has to be more interpersonal. It motivates me to make sure that that part of it succeeds. Plus of course it doesn't hurt that [Owner] is one of my best friends man 'cause I do not want to see that guy fail. I would give him everything I got, to make sure he succeeds.

Employee perception of leadership. In my examination of how the employees of this case business perceive the owner's leadership, I discovered three main themes that

persisted but remained disparate compared to previous data trends. These emergent themes surround *appreciation, micromanagement*, and *loyalty*. Chapters 3 and 4 described the coding process in detail but a graphical display of how codes emerged and became consolidated into major themes can be found in Appendix F and G. Appreciation speaks to the lack of positive feedback in light of an environment of predominantly negative feedback or feedback administered when something does not go well. *Micromanagement* addresses the level of constant management including low-level work tasks, and *loyalty* refers to the employee's sense of allegiance and faithfulness to the owner.

   Theme 1: Appreciation. When examining *appreciation,* several employees expressed the desire to receive positive feedback when they perform high-quality work tasks. This appears to be lacking in the business by the statement Participant 12 made when asked, excluding money, what they would like to see more from their leadership, "Yeah, just a balance of feedback to feel like that my boss has noticed. Not just even the most minuscule things they think we might've missed or want us to do." When I asked Participant 15, a similar theme emerged in their statement that they craved

   encouragement, appreciation. Well, it's just a like, you know… I've worked here
   [redacted] years and all I've seen are negative write-ups so in that circumstance
   for me, it's like, well, it doesn't matter how good I do, 'cause that's just expected.

Participant 15 went on to say, "It doesn't matter how good I do, I'm not ever going to get a positive [feedback comment]." Participant 12 echoed that sentiment by stating they desired, "Maybe balance out the nit picking and micromanaging with actually noticing

when people do positive things." The lack of positive reinforcement has created an atmosphere of cynicism, identified by Participant 12 stating that, "There's no incentive or motivation for people to be more positive there. So, it's this culture of cynicism and complaining and, um, it gets pretty disheartening."

This cynical leadership climate appears to stifle creativity and motivation and directly links to the theme of micromanagement discussed before.

Theme 2: Micromanagement. As micromanagement traits pertain to motivation, Participant 4 stated:

> You know what? There really isn't a lot of motivation. I mean the only motivation
>
> right now for me is to make money. Other than that, we don't get a lot of
>
> motivation to really want to do great for the company.

This employee perception of micromanagement, combined with a lack of positive reinforcement leads to a feeling of awkwardness or of employees feeling uncomfortable and disengaged, demonstrated when Participant 2 wished the owner would, "Just like believe that we'll actually do our job because sometimes I feel like [Owner] is stalking us. Like take a chill pill."

Theme 3: Loyalty. Finally, the theme of loyalty emerged in several interviews, either in direct reference to the owner or with reference to the reputation and quality of the brand and product. Examples of this are seen when Participant 12 said, "Also, I do feel like a sense of loyalty and responsibility toward the owner." Supporting this theme was the notion that some employees have followed the owner from previous business ventures to their place of current employment combined with the realization that the

owner has helped them out in their personal life. Participant 17 explained this by stating, "He was a friend of mine. I worked with hem in the [industry] years before I came here and he's always just been the kind of guy who had your back." Furthermore, Participant 17 and Participant 12 also stated that their loyalty resulted from the owner helping them out with dynamic elements that occurred in their personal life; specifically, when a family member had passed away.

Loyalty to the product and the brand that the leader created is also an emerging theme that motivates the employees to engage and do a good job. When asked, Participant 3 stated, "We got a good product. Also, I do believe in our product and I think it's definitely one of the best burgers around here." When I asked Participant 3 what it was that motivated them to do a good job, they responded with, "Uh, the product. And it's a very good product!" demonstrating that in the apparent absence of positive reinforcements from their leadership, faith in a quality product drives them to perform well.

This data suggests that the employees of this case organization are engaged but are finding motivation from other sources and not their leaders to keep them engaged. Others explain their internal motivation for engagement as that compelled from a deep loyalty to the owner. Other than money, there did not emerge any data linking the organizational leaders' behavior to follower engagement, often actually citing an onslaught of negative feedback, characterized as nitpicking or micromanagement that resulted.

**Voice Engagement Survey and employee perception compared to actual
intent.** This section of data analysis will address the first research question I posed which
is: RQ1 How do the employees' perceptions of the business's engagement strategy
compare with the leader's engagement strategies intent? From the interview results, I am
able to triangulate findings with the outcome of the Voice Engagement Survey. The very
first finding from the survey data relates to the number of respondents that felt passionate
or engaged in their work. Like what was uncovered in the interview data, respondents felt
a sense of passion in their work, but were not motivated specifically out of overt acts of
leadership. Instead, employees are motivated by their belief in the product quality and out
of loyalty to the owner. The survey solidifies this phenomenon that the organization is
moderately engaged, with the result 64% of the organization feeling as if they are
engaged. Compared to the rest of the accommodation, hospitality, tourism, cafe and
restaurant industry benchmark, the case organization scored 7% higher than that
benchmark, indicating a higher-than average level of engagement within this
organization.

The engagement and passion finding were further reinforced by the VES's finding
relating to *progress*. The VES defines progress as a reflection of staff perceptions about
organizational performance. The survey data showed that progress for the case
organization is high, with 85% of survey respondents indicating they are satisfied with
the organization's progress and success in delivering outcomes. The data also showed a
lack of positive reinforcement, a lack of awareness in behavior modeling on the part of
the owner, and a lack of perceived positive support on leadership. Regardless, the

employees within the organization feel as if they are delivering a quality product as well as providing top-tier customer service. To take that one step further, when this data is compared to the industry benchmark, the case organization results are 13% higher than what is typical at other similar industry entities.

The top questions that had the highest departure from the industry benchmark and highest favorable response rate also exemplify commitment to customer satisfaction, work role clarity, and organizational and mission commitment. These responses are illustrated in Table 5 for response rate, and Table 6 regarding industry benchmark departure.

Table 6.

Climate Survey (VES) Scoring for Questions with the Highest Favorable Response Rate

Survey Question	Theme	Response Rate	Industry Benchmark
I understand how my job contributes to the overall success of this Organization.	Role Clarity	100%	+19%
This organization offers products and/or services that are high quality.	Customer Satisfaction	94%	+23%
I believe in the overall purpose of this organization.	Mission & Values	94%	+28%
I feel a sense of loyalty and commitment to this organization.	Organizational Commitment	94%	+27%

Table 7. *Climate Survey Scoring for Questions with the Highest Benchmark Departure*

Survey Question	Theme	Response Rate	Industry Benchmark
I believe in the overall purpose of this organization.	Mission & Values	94%	+28%
I feel a sense of loyalty and commitment to this organization.	Organizational Commitment	94%	+27%
When people start in new jobs here, they are given enough guidance and training.	Role Clarity	88%	+27%
This organization offers products and/or services that are high quality.	Customer Satisfaction	94%	+23%

By comparing these responses, it is possible to see how the employees positively

manifest their work behaviors through a strong belief in the values of the organization,

how they understand their organizational roles, and through a belief in customer

satisfaction. Compared to what was gathered from the leader's intent, employee loyalty

and organizational commitment scores relate to the thematic manifestation of

environment and performance-based rewards from the assessment of leader intent.

Therefore, organizational purpose, training, and quality of product and service are all

highly understood and acted upon in a way that is clear from the data. Figure 2

graphically presents the distribution of VES survey results across the complete spectrum

of categories, broken further into subthemes, showing percentage of favorability as well

as a comparison to industry benchmark.

category results

		%N/A	2019 % Fav	Distribution	Ind % Diff
PURPOSE	Organization Direction	2%	64%		+5%
	Mission & Values	0%	79%		+13%
	Role Clarity	0%	90%		+10%
PROPERTY	Resources	0%	67%		-1%
	Processes	0%	65%		0%
	Technology	0%	88%		+23%
	Safety	0%	89%		+20%
PARTICIPATION	Leadership	0%	53%		-7%
	Learning & Development	2%	66%		+4%
	Involvement	0%	35%		-12%
	Rewards & Recognition	3%	46%		-7%
	Performance Appraisal	19%	51%		-2%

Legend: High ≥80%, Mod 50<80%, Low <50%. Distribution: SD, D, M, A, SA. Ind % Diff: ≥+10%, ±10%, ≤-10%.

Figure 2. Graphical presentation of the distribution of VES Climate survey results across the complete spectrum of categories with delineation into further subthemes. This figure also presents the percentage of favorability as well as a comparison to industry benchmark.

Conversely, while examining communication and respect elements of the organizational climate, the owner indicated a frank lack of relevance in their message. The owner stated they had "lost touch," and rhetorically asked, "How do I give them that motivation? I have no idea. I got to figure out a way to instill that [sense of motivation] into them." As a result, the employees are not indicating that they are receiving confidence and do not have a role model for motivated behavior in the business, with many citing external and personal sources for this motivation. These external, personal sources manifested in work ethics. It is this section of the data that I found the cohesive, family quality of the business serves to balance the lack of positive feedback and reinforcement, offering a supportive byproduct shared by the employees but not provided by top-tier leaders. This explains the close comparison between leader intent and follower

perception with a blatant and honest lack of *touch* or connection. The presence of these higher-order support behaviors where found in the depth and richness of interview responses where respondents identified aspects of work ethics and organizational commitment that were learned from family, through growing up, and a combination of the two.

In summary, the leader's intent to engage employees is based on creating a work environment that is fun, past-paced, and energized by the excitement of the product and the challenges presented by providing a high degree of customer service. The business owner admits that he/she may have lost touch with the employees. This disconnect was apparent in the VES survey results where the related element scores were extremely low. These strategies are perceived by the employees quite clearly as many employees indicated that their work environment is one with a mom and pop-type feel where their team feels a lot like that of a family dynamic. Employees' perception are that customer service and product quality are paramount and employees do believe in the product being served. Feedback deficiencies do manifest in the employees' perception that they often feel micromanaged and that there is no positive feedback provided. Therefore, I assess that the strategy aspects that are actively being communicate by the owner and leaders are correctly perceived by the employees. Similarly, the owner-stated deficiencies are also being accurately perceived by the employees with regards to positive reinforcement and the lack of positive feedback.

RQ 2: Employee Perception and their Effect on Attitudes toward Work

Performance

This major section will cover the final research question posed in this project.

That question is:RQ2 How do these employee perceptions influence employee attitudes

toward work performance?

To answer this question, one needs to reflect on what was discovered regarding employee

perception. Additionally, the reflection must be critically compared that to what we can

learn from examining employee attitudes toward work performances.

Employee attitudes toward work performance. From the interview data, one

can identify several themes that pertain to attitudes governing work performance. Again,

Chapters 3 and 4 outline the coding process but please see Appendix F and G for a

graphical representation on how I developed codes into major themes. For this section, I

grouped these attitudes themes under the thematic structure of *reputation, personal pride*,

and *positive work ethic*. Each code will cover examples of the amplifying theme. These

themes and corresponding codes encompass employee attitudes regarding work

performance only and will remain separated from leader intent for this section.

Theme 1: Reputation. The first theme of *reputation* identifies the restaurant's

notoriety within the community as well as the reputation for quality in the product.

Respondent 2 explained that, "This is a pretty like kind of famous place in the area …It's

like we have to live up to that expectation of like all of these really awesome reviews."

This notion of reputation is similarly echoed in Participant 15's comments when they

stated, "So you've got to make sure people are happy, keep them coming back." It is clear

that the employees understand the reputation of the business and the product, but also understand the energy created by being a part of the success.

  Theme 2: Personal Pride. The second theme of *personal pride* is slightly difficult to separate from that of *work ethic.* For this exercise, I separate the two by the use of language that personalizes the response, alluding to the internalization of the behavior or action in the responses from the interview participants that connect with personal pride. As an example, Participant 13 expressed what I interpreted as pride with the response to the question about what makes him go a good job. Participant 13 responded, "Um, just, I think the, you know, just doing your job right. I don't think it's anything specific to this place, but just as a person, I like to do any job I'm doing as best as I can." The example of *I like to do,* and *I'm doing,* express the example of internalized behavior, indicative of the pride expressed by the participants. Another example of pride was evident in the response from Participant 19 who stated:

   I just, for me, I always want to do a good job, strive to be the best that I can be,

   that whatever I'm doing. I don't think it's the environment. I just think that's it's

   me; my essence a little bit.

Both examples speak to the level of personal pride which was a reoccurring theme that emerged from this study.

  Theme 3: Work Ethic. The final theme I discovered was *work ethic*. I identified and separated work ethic from the use of action-oriented language that describes the way in which work tasks are accomplished. As examples, Participant 20 expressed examples of elevated work ethic by stating, "I can contribute or that I contribute would be, I guess

just making sure stuff gets done every day. Making sure we actually go through a prep

list and try to get the most done." Another example of elevate levels of positive work

ethics include the response of Participant 3 regarding their level of participation at work,

"I do everything within my control of making it correct for the, for the customer…Even

on my days off, if I can come in and help out, I will." Although these examples speak to

the degree of positive work ethics that exists within the organization, a more in-depth

examination is required to assess the origin of that drive. A summary of survey questions

with the highest industry benchmark departure are listed in Table 7.

Table 8.

*VES Climate Survey Scoring for Questions for the Highest Negative Benchmark
Departure*

Survey Question	Theme	Response Rate	Industry Benchmark
Senior management listen to other staff.	Communication	31%	-26%
The rewards and recognition I receive from this job are fair.	Rewards/Incentives	31%	-20%
I am consulted before decisions that affect me are made.	Communication	26%	-20%
I am satisfied with the benefits I receive (super, leave, etc.)	Rewards/Incentives	36%	-18%

To determine if the work ethic phenomenon is derived from the owner's intent as

part of a strategy to engage employees, a deeper look at the work ethic trend is required.

To assess the source, three responses seem to explain the source as internal to the

individual through upbringing rather than via a means used to engage employees. For

example, Participant 6 stated, "All I would do a good job no matter where I worked for

cause that's just in my, my uh, my chemical makeup. There I was, I was built like that."

Participant 19 stated:

> My mom was a hard worker. She's a single mom to four kids for a long time and
> so she was always working and she never had a bad attitude about it. She might
> be exhausted, but we never saw it. She worked her ass off to let us kids have what
> we needed. So, I have a strong work ethic because of that and I, that's just the way
> I was raised.

Participant 20 also indicated a source for their work ethic being similar stating, "Um, that's just how I was raised. Just if you are going to do something, do it right." These findings indicate that the source for the high levels of positive work ethic within the organization correlate to external sources within the employees and may indicate the source as emanating from upbringing rather than being engaged in the workplace.

In summary, the employees' perceptions of the leader's engagement do not appear from the data to have an impact on employee work task performance. This study concluded that employees find their own source of motivation that comes from factors relating to how they were raised and are therefore external to the leader's strategy. Furthermore, the employees' perceptions regarding customer satisfaction and desire for success are mostly also independent from the leader's strategy and are sourced from the desire to make more money and to do the best job they can within their own abilities.

Summary

In summary, while the leader indicated that he/she intended to engage employees by controlling the work environment but struggled with feedback and aspects regarding

communication. Employees perceived family work dynamic and the weaknesses in feedback manifest as a feeling of negative or no feedback at all combined with a perception of being micromanaged. The leader's strategy is actively being communicated. However, the perception of work environment reflect was flawed. Weaknesses in communication are not being perceived accurately and are interpreted in a less-than-ideal way. Employees' perceptions. Although sometimes misaligned with leader intent, do impact their attitudes toward work performance as it pertains to their own personal work ethic and sense of personal pride. These actions do align with leader intent when it comes to safeguarding the reputation of the organization.

In conclusion, this chapter began with an overview of the main goals I set out to accomplish in this research study. Chapter 4 began with a presentation of the research setting, explanation of the participant demographics, and a description of how the data was collected in this research study. Following these sections, the data analysis project was examined, followed by evidence for trustworthiness. This chapter concluded with a detailed look at the study's results. Using this data, the final chapter will offer a discussion of the research findings, provide a conclusion to this research, and offer recommendations for future research opportunities given what was learned from this study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to explore the alignment or misalignment of employee perceptions of and the leader's intent of engagement strategies. The exploration occurred from the viewpoint of the employees of a small, Midwest business. I compared the results from face-to-face interviews to the results of a climate survey. The climate survey catalyzed data triangulation and I administered it to assess whether organizational climate is consistent with the match or mismatch of employee perceptions and engagement.

The approach for this exploratory case study included three sources of data. The three sources were employee perceptions, leader intent, and a climate survey, all assisting with triangulation. Interviews were used to explore the employee perceptions of the engagement strategies. I conducted this study to examine the phenomenon of employee engagement through the conceptual lensing of organizational climate and personal engagement at work. Using these elements, I found that employees are able to accurately perceive the leader's engagement strategy when communicated actively. The results indicated that weaknesses in communication manifests in a less-than ideal way, causing employee perceptions to affect their attitudes toward work tasks. I also found that employee work ethic and personal pride served to overcome areas of misalignment with leader intent, caused by acknowledged areas of communication weaknesses.

Interpretation of Findings

The phenomenon of employee engagement and disengagement has many facets, as the preceding literature review identified. Engaged employees bring positive attributes

to their organizations that positively affect organizational climate as well as bring substantial contributions to organizational effectiveness (Anthony-McMann et al., 2017; Madden & Bailey, 2017). Of interest to this study, Kahn's (1990) theory of employee engagement connects to employee voice, climate, and organizational environmental factors directly to ineffective organizational cultural values, aversion to work in a team setting, and overall physical, emotional, and cognitive absenteeism (Hollis, 2015). The study results illuminated elements of aversion to work in a team setting, and emotional, and cognitive absenteeism. Also germane to this study, I found that disengaged employees, as Kahn (1990) identified, did display some avoidant behaviors and appeared to be lackadaisical in completing work tasks. Most employees also felt that they have limited opportunities to advance. Of Kahn's (1990) observations, the latter of limited opportunities to advance was the only attribute that seemed to result in disengagement. Findings are broken down according to the overarching conceptual lens of employee engagement, split into the major categories of citizen culture versus withdraw, employee voice, organizational communication, and organizational climate.

Citizen Culture versus Withdrawal

Results of this study suggest that the employees of the organization feel as if they are part of the energy generated by the product and the businesses they support but do not feel the leader listens to them. Most employees expressed a strong belief in the product and the reputation of the brand presented in this case business. The climate assessment scores regarding organizational values and processes supported this observation. Similarly, the noticeably low performance and appraisal scores on the climate survey

supported perception that their leader did not listen to them. The mixed results of the climate survey indicate a mix of engagement and disengagement, suggesting that a strong belief in product and brand is enough overcome any negative perceptions related being listened to. I concluded that employees may seek intrinsic engagement pathways that are not indigenous to the organization.

Employee Voice

The degree of employee voice within an organization can serve as a barometer to the degree of overall employee engagement (Ruck et al., 2017). Measuring employee voice by comparing it within the context of management's strategy to achieve engagement, offered a way that aided in understanding how front-line employees perceive that strategy (Madden & Bailey, 2017). Climate assessment scores pertaining to recognition, incentives, and communication scored noticeable lower than industry benchmarks, indicating that the leader has not correctly interpreted the message being sent by employees. This appeared to be unintentional. The data also suggested there is an abundance of creativity within the employee workforce that is being repressed by the owner's strategy of merit-based rewards. The results of the climate survey regarding providing customer satisfaction and an understanding of organizational values further indicated that the employees are finding intrinsic sources of engagement rather than leader-generated strategies.

Organizational Communication

Organizational communication is a complex domain with many different areas and qualities. The domain of communication within an organization, according to Salem

and Timmerman (2017), accounts for things like verbal and nonverbal communication, internal and external forms of communication, and the varied levels of relationships when describing the process of communication. Organizational communication was a key element in understanding this study's results.

Employee perspective gleaned from the study data indicated that the overall message regarding organizational values and the family-feel strategy is being received accurately. Employees also seem to understand that product output quality is very important. The leader intent is being accurately communicated; however, there is another misalignment with the return loop of the communication process going back to the leader as evidence by both the interview data and low climate survey scores on communication. An opportunity exists to improve the two-way communication path where employees are offered the flexibility to innovate by first challenging then changing organizational norms relating to leader intent that could capture employee creativity. When employee communication is perceived as not being heard, the communication flow stops because there is perceived to be no valid reason to continue transmission. This conclusion emerged repeatedly from the data and climate assessment findings regarding communication. It is possible that the leader's message may not be accurately received or even heard at all. Enhancing employee participation is a great opportunity to change the level of employee engagement within the communication process.

Organizational Climate

In the final area regarding organizational climate, I examined the shared vision and understanding of norms regarding organization's values. Nasution et al. (2016) stated

that organizational climate needs to be such that employees are driven to improve; a task

that the literature has assessed as difficult at times. Nasution et al. (2016) stated that

creating an organizational climate that brings members together to meet organizational

goals, while simultaneously driving employees to improve performance, can be difficult.

A lack of harmony can occur when a disparity emerges between what employees

perceive, as compared to the leader's expected climate (Nasution et al., 2016).

Findings from this study indicated that employee perception of organizational

support manifested in the form of a perceived lack of employee growth and reward

opportunities, as indicated by substantial negative departure from industry benchmarks

for rewards and recognition. Similarly, the lack of perceived leader support is solidified

with employees vocalizing a feeling of being micromanaged. One could postulate that if

managers were aware of employee perceptions and took these perceptions into

consideration when crafting the expected climate, organizational efficiency and employee

growth might improve.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations are researcher-identified weaknesses in the research mitigated when

the researcher identifies these limitations, showing well thought-out preparation going

into the research exercise (Holloway & Galvin, 2017). This study had two limitations.

The first limitation of this study was that the sample may not be representative of small

restaurant businesses across the United States. This study was also limited by specific

regional cultural norms and beliefs that could affect employee perceptions of pride in

work and work ethic. Although care was given in the process of explaining key terms to

respondents, limitations arose relating to some participants' inability to conceptualize the concepts involved with the term *engagement*. This limitation was identified early and mitigated through the process of explaining the term in a way that was more ubiquitous. Issues with participant honesty did not appear to manifest in this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was limited in scope and confined to the geographical region of the American Midwest. Given this, a recommendation for future studies would be to enhance the interview process by adding another round of interviews designed to follow up on central themes that emerged in the initial stages of coding but include other areas beyond the Midwest. Doing so will add more depth with regard to the sources of these themes versus simply how they emerged in the case of this study.

The next assumption in this study was that the small business I studied was representative of all small businesses within the restaurant industry. This assumption was required in order to tailor research finding to other similar businesses. When compared to other data collected within the service industry, this research demonstrated major positive and negative departures from the data collected compared to the rest of the service industry. Positive departures in the data from industry benchmarks was helpful in identifying areas where the case business is experiencing success. The negative departures from benchmark identified areas where there were opportunities for the business to improve. Although I found the data that resulted from the benchmark comparison easily digestible, a recommendation for future research would be to separate the restaurant industry data from the non-restaurant businesses lumped together under the

term *service industry*. Doing so would glean better fidelity into the specific causes of positive and negative divergence.

Most employees usually start a job by wanting to do a good job and fit into the overarching organizational culture. As their time in the job continues, employees may begin to perceive differing levels of fairness, equality, and organizational justice (Pareek, 1994). They also may encounter other unclear or unknown influences that may negatively their level of work quality, output, and overall physical and emotional presence. While the climate assessment was used in this study, direct observation of work behavior could further validate the role organizational climate can play in employee perceptions.

Many factors are involved in organizational success. Some of these factors are socioeconomic conditions in the community, federal and state regulations, and natural disasters. I focused this research study only on the aspects of employee and managerial perspectives on employee engagement strategies. Another viable recommendation for future research would be to include these variables in the scope of the study. As a very tangible example, the greater Omaha area recently experienced devastating flooding after the research data had been collected. Understanding how employees perceive natural disasters like this example can offer insight into outside factors that employees take into the work environment in the form of an emotional burden that could influence the communication process or work climate. Expanding of the study to other Midwestern businesses beyond the small restaurant type is warranted to determine if the results of this study may be transferable to leaders of other small businesses within the study's geographical region (Noble & Smith, 2015).

Implications

This study highlights the need for leaders of small businesses to stay attuned with employee perceptions. Tools used in this study could help leaders more accurately assess if their engagement strategies are correctly perceived and effective. Holtz and Harold (2013) identified that effective engagement promotes positive organizational outcomes, improvement of overall employee health, and can reduce small business failure rates. Using what the organization already has in place regarding engagement strategies, this study identified areas where alignment and misalignment between leader engagement strategy and employee perception. As a result of this, my study sheds light on ways to reduce negative employee engagement by identifying areas where intent do not align with perception to promote small business success. The implications of these findings can help minimize counterproductive work behaviors in the organization often caused by a lack of employee engagement as a result of a lack of harmony between intent and perception.

Employee attitudes toward their work contribute to the building of perceptions of fairness and concern on the part of the organizational leaders (Cahill et al., 2015). Organizational procedures, perceived by employees as fair, contribute to perceived support of employees' interests and their conveyance of a sense of concern regarding employees' well-being (Wallace et al., 2016).

The findings of this study highlighted areas where leader strategic intent and employee perception of engagement strategies were misaligned. The areas most affected by this seem to relate to perceived fairness. Being aware of, and continually adjusting the way that leader intent is communicated, should result in enhanced employee engagement.

Managers who are aware of these potential misalignments are in a better position to optimize engagement strategies by harmonizing policy intent with employee perception. Given the current economic environment, it is imperative that leaders make every effort to sustain and encourage a positive work environment. Added indirect effects can actually reduce unnecessary organizational costs and potentially enhance employee health with reduced work all through the identification of areas in misalignment (Holtz & Harold, 2013). Aligning intent by using employee perception as a gage to the degree the intent is perceived, is proven to improve employee engagement and reduce counterproductive work behaviors.

Many small businesses do not have the capacity to absorb and overcome toxic work behaviors (Kennedy & Benson, 2016). These costs of misaligned strategies can also be harmful not only to the organization but also the employee. There is increasing evidence that stress at work has debilitating effects on the health of employees and can result in damage the business' reputation (Shoss et al., 2015). This understanding highlights ways to improve alignment between leader engagement strategies and employees' perceptions by identifying clues that signal or trigger lagging employee engagement.

Gauging employee voice offers a means to enhance employee commitment, involvement, and participation (Marchington, 2016; Ruck et al., 2017). This study provided a glimpse into new insights that could significantly affect front-line employee perceptions of the leader's overall strategy (Madden & Bailey, 2017) by highlighting specific areas where employee voice provides value in aligning perceptions and intent, as

evidence by Kahn's (1990) concept of the social aspect of engagement including

commitment, involvement, and organizational participation (Kahn, 1990; Ruck et al.,

2017). The *Voice Engagement Survey* used in this study is the instrument that when

combined with an accurate assessment of organizational climate, offer fresh insights into

how the employees' perception of intent compared to actual intent within an

organization.

Numerous studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between employee

engagement and desirable work outcomes (Anthony-McMann et al., 2017). Until now, an

overgeneralization of the phenomenon has led to a decrease in theoretical as well as

practical utility (Anthony-McMann et al., 2017). This study provides tangible insight that

bridges the gap between theory and practice by promoting a more authentic look at the

underlying context driving the definition of engagement (Madden & Bailey, 2017). The

theoretical implications of this foundation can be a blueprint to explore the depth and

meaning of employee engagement via employee perceptions in the small business

environment (Shuck et al., 2016). Harmonizing the leader intent of engagement strategies

with realities of employees' perception of that intent could lead to improved engagement

via an improved communication processes.

Conclusions

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to explore the alignment or

misalignment of employee perceptions of, and the leader's intent of, engagement

strategies. The exploration occurred from the viewpoint of the employees of a small,

Midwest business. The nature of this study was qualitative. The approach for this

exploratory case study included three sources of data. The three sources are employee

perceptions, leader intent, and a climate survey that assisted in triangulation. Interviews

were used to explore the employee perceptions of the engagement strategies. The

subsequent climate survey identified the level of congruence or incongruence of

employee perceptions and leader intent of engagement strategies. This study was

conducted to examine the phenomenon of employee engagement through the conceptual

lensing of organizational climate and personal engagement at work. Using these

elements, this study examined the level of personal motivation of the employee.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Email

Dear [insert name],

My name is Harley Barmore and I am a student at Walden University. I am emailing you to invite you to participate in my research study about leadership. You are eligible to be in this study because of employment here at [site withheld]. I obtained your contact information from [restaurant owner].

If you decide to participate in this study, you will get to fill out a brief climate survey and take part in an interview with me. I would like to audio record your interview and then I will use the information you provide to complete my dissertation. This research project is private and your identity as well as the information you provide will all be kept is strict confidentiality.

Please keep in mind that your participation is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. Your information and perspective would be helpful to my research and the advancement of the study of leadership. I really hope you choose to participate. If you would like to participate or have any other questions about this study, please email me at [redacted]

Thank you very much for your time and I look forward to hearing from you soon,

-Harley Barmore, Ph.D. Student, Walden University
 Student ID # [redacted]
 Program: Ph.D. in Management
Specialization: Leadership and Organizational Change

Appendix B: Permission to use the Voice Engagement Survey

Harley,

Thanks for your interest in using our survey. Yes, we're keen to support non-profit research. Your PhD sounds topic exciting and we're happy for you to use the survey.

I've copied in Dr Louise Parkes who oversees our research using the survey. She can provide other articles or templates that may help your research. We have the survey available for efficient online completion, but this service is aimed at practitioners and rarely useful for researchers given the typical need for researchers to add additional questions. We can provide an electronic copy of the survey questions that might help with you pulling together your research survey.

I should note that I'm now full time Director of Voice Project, the consultancy that grew out of my research at Macquarie University. For more information see www.voiceproject.com and my direct email is now [redacted]

What is the timeline you are working to, and what can we provide to support your research? I'll leave much of the liaison to you and Lou, but I'd be keen to hear how your research progresses.

All the best,

Pete

_____

[remainder of signature block redacted]

Appendix C: Baseline Voice Engagement Survey

Not Applicable/ Don't Know		Strongly DISAGREE	Tend To DISAGREE	Mixed Feelings/ Neutral	Tend To AGREE	Strongly AGREE
0		1	2	3	4	5

How to fill in the survey:

- Answer the questions based on your personal experience within the last 12 months. Don't try to think how other people might answer the questions, or what might be happening in other parts of the organization.
- When you don't feel as though a question is appropriate for you, don't have an opinion, or don't know the answer, answer "Not Applicable/Don't Know".

Please note the following definitions as they are used in the survey:

- "This organization" = Org XYZ
- "Senior Management" = CEO and Executive Managers
- "My manager" = the person you directly report to
- "Customers" = xxxx

Standard Benchmark Questions [can be used "as is" or tailored]
Use the disagree/agree scale above to rate the statements below

Score

			Score
Organization Direction	1.	I am aware of the vision senior management has for the future of this organization	___
	2.	I am aware of the values of this organization	___
	3.	I am aware of the overall strategy senior management has for this organization	___
Results Focus	4.	Staff are encouraged to continually improve their performance	___
	5.	High standards of performance are expected	___
	6.	This organization has a strong focus on achieving positive results	___

			Score
Mission & Values	7.	I believe in the overall purpose of this organization	___
	8.	I believe in the values of this organization	___
	9.	I believe in the work done by this organization	___
Ethics	10.	This organization is ethical	___
	11.	This organization is socially responsible	___
	12.	This organization is environmentally responsible	___
Role Clarity	13.	I understand my goals and objectives and what is required of me in my job	___
	14.	I understand how my job contributes to the overall success of this organization	___
	15.	During my day-to-day duties I understand how well I am doing	___
Diversity	16.	Sexual harassment is prevented and discouraged	___
	17.	Discrimination is prevented and discouraged	___
	18.	There is equal opportunity for all staff in this organization	___
	19.	Bullying and abusive behaviors are prevented and discouraged	___
Resources	20.	I have access to the right equipment and resources to do my job well	___
	21.	I have easy access to all the information I need to do my job well	___
	22.	We can get access to additional resources when we need to	___
Processes	23.	There are clear policies and procedures for how work is to be done	___
	24.	In this organization it is clear who has responsibility for what	___
	25.	Our policies and procedures are efficient and well-designed	___
Technology	26.	The technology used in this organization is kept up-to-date	___
	27.	This organization makes good use of technology	___
	28.	Staff in this organization have good skills at using the technology we have	___

			Score

Safety	29.	Keeping high levels of health and safety is a priority of this organization	___
	30.	We are given all necessary safety equipment and training	___
	31.	Staff are aware of their work health and safety responsibilities	___
	32.	Supervisors and management engage in good safety behavior	___
Facilities	33.	The buildings, grounds, and facilities I use are in good condition	___
	34.	The condition of the buildings, grounds, and facilities I use is regularly reviewed	___
	35.	The buildings, grounds, and facilities I use are regularly upgraded	___

"Senior Management" = CEO and Executive Managers

Leadership	36.	I have confidence in the ability of senior management	___
	37.	Senior management are good role models for staff	___
	38.	Senior management keep people informed about what's going on	___
	39.	Senior management listen to other staff	___
Recruitment & Selection	40.	This organization is good at selecting the right people for the right jobs	___
	41.	Managers in this organization know the benefits of employing the right people	___
	42.	Managers in this organization are clear about the type of people we need to employ	___
Cross-Unit Cooperation	43.	There is good communication across all sections of this organization	___
	44.	Knowledge and information are shared throughout this organization	___
	45.	There is cooperation between different sections in this organization	___

Score

Learning & Development	46.	When people start in new jobs here they are given enough guidance and training ___
	47.	There is a commitment to ongoing training and development of staff ___
	48.	The training and development I've received has improved my performance ___
Involvement	49.	I have input into everyday decision-making in this organization ___
	50.	I am encouraged to give feedback about things that concern me ___
	51.	I am consulted before decisions that affect me are made ___
Rewards & Recognition	52.	The rewards and recognition I receive from this job are fair ___
	53.	This organization fulfils its obligations to me ___
	54.	I am satisfied with the income I receive ___
	55.	I am satisfied with the benefits I receive (super, leave, etc) ___
Performance Appraisal	56.	My performance is reviewed and evaluated often enough ___
	57.	The way my performance is evaluated is fair ___
	58.	The way my performance is evaluated provides me with clear guidelines for improvement ___

"My manager" = the person you directly report to

Supervision	59.	I have confidence in the ability of my manager ___
	60.	My manager listens to what I have to say ___
	61.	My manager gives me help and support ___
	62.	My manager treats me and my work colleagues fairly ___
Career Opportunities	63.	Enough time and effort is spent on career planning ___
	64.	I am given opportunities to develop skills needed for career progression ___
	65.	There are enough opportunities for my career to progress in this organization ___

			Score
Motivation & Initiative	66.	My co-workers put in extra effort whenever necessary	___
	67.	My co-workers are quick to take advantage of opportunities	___
	68.	My co-workers take the initiative in solving problems	___
Talent	69.	I have confidence in the ability of my co-workers	___
	70.	My co-workers are productive in their jobs	___
	71.	My co-workers do their jobs quickly and efficiently	___
Teamwork	72.	I have good working relationships with my co-workers	___
	73.	My co-workers give me help and support	___
	74.	My co-workers and I work well as a team	___
Wellness	75.	I am given enough time to do my job well	___
	76.	I feel in control and on top of things at work	___
	77.	I feel emotionally well at work	___
	78.	I am able to keep my job stress at an acceptable level	___
Work/Life Balance	79.	I maintain a good balance between work and other aspects of my life	___
	80.	I am able to stay involved in non-work interests and activities	___
	81.	I have a social life outside of work	___
	82.	I am able to meet my family responsibilities while still doing what is expected of me at work	___
Flexibility	83.	This organization has enough flexible work arrangements to meet my needs	___
	84.	I can change my working hours if I need to	___
	85.	I have a say about my work conditions	___
Organization Objectives	86.	The goals and objectives of this organization are being reached	___
	87.	The future for this organization is positive	___
	88.	Overall, this organization is successful	___

			Score
Change & Innovation	89.	Change is handled well in this organization	___
	90.	The way this organization is run has improved over the last year	___
	91.	This organization is innovative	___
	92.	This organization is good at learning from its mistakes and successes	___

"Customers" = xxxx

Customer Satisfaction	93.	This organization offers products and/or services that are high quality	___
	94.	This organization understands the needs of its customers	___
	95.	Customers are satisfied with our products and/or services	___
Organizational Commitment	96.	I feel a sense of loyalty and commitment to this organization	___
	97.	I am proud to tell people that I work for this organization	___
	98.	I feel emotionally attached to this organization	___
	99.	I am willing to put in extra effort for this organization	___
Job Satisfaction	100.	My work gives me a feeling of personal accomplishment	___
	101.	I like the kind of work I do	___
	102.	Overall, I am satisfied with my job	___
Intention To Stay	103.	I am likely to still be working in this organization in two years' time	___
	104.	I would like to still be working in this organization in five years' time	___
	105.	I can see a future for me in this organization	___
Survey Response	106.	I received feedback about the results of the previous survey I completed in this organization	
	107.	I have seen improvements at this organization resulting from the previous survey I completed	
Additional Items?	108.		
	109.		
	110.		

Survey Complete	**Thank you for completing the survey.**

	Your responses have been saved. **You can now choose to review or edit your responses, come back to them at a later time, or finalize the survey.** **REVIEW RESPONSES:** If you wish, you can revise your responses by clicking the "Previous Section" button below to move backwards one page at a time, or the "Review" button to review your answers from the beginning of the survey. **RETURN LATER:** If you think you may want to return to your answers at a later time, you should click the Email Return Link button below to send yourself a copy of your unique Return Link. Your Return Link will remain open up to the point you either Finalize, or the survey close time is reached. **FINALISE: If you are happy with your responses, please click the "Finalise" button below. This will close off your survey and prevent any further changes from being made. You will be unable to return to your survey answers after you Finalise.** If you have any questions about this survey please contact the survey contact listed below.
Survey Contact	Name:
	Email:
	Phone:
Privacy & Consent	For more detailed information about this survey and how your data will be used please **click here.**

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

The following are the interview questions for this research project. For the following questions, I will ask the respondents to think about what it is like to work here. I will ask respondents to think about things like the work atmosphere and things that motivate you. Also, I will ask them to consider how they fit into the overall business.

What is it about this company that makes you want to work here?

What is it like to work here?

What kinds of things here really make you want to do a great job?

What kinds of things do you think would motivate you more to do a great job?

How do you think you contribute to the business?

How does being happy/would being happier at work effect your work?

How do you fit in as part of the team here?

Excluding money, what kind of things would you like to see from the bosses that would make you even happier with your job?

Is there anything else you could tell me that would help me understand the work atmosphere here?

Is there anything else you could tell me that would help me better understand your motivation here?

Appendix E: VES Tailored for Surveying

Not Applicable / Don't Know		Strongly DISAGREE	Tend To DISAGREE	Mixed Feelings/ Neutral	Tend To AGREE	Strongly AGREE
0		1	2	3	4	5

How to fill in the survey:

Answer the questions based on your personal experience within the last 12 months. Don't try to think how other people might answer the questions, or what might be happening in other parts of the organization.

When you don't feel as though a question is appropriate for you, don't have an opinion, or don't know the answer, answer "Not Applicable/Don't Know".

Please note the following definitions as they are used in the survey:

"This organization" = Sinful Burger Grill and Bar

"Senior Management" = Owner, Jim Nearing

"My manager" = The person you directly report to

"Customers" = The people who eat and drink here at Sinful Burger

Not Applicable/ Don't Know		Strongly DISAGREE	Tend To DISAGREE	Mixed Feelings/ Neutral	Tend To AGREE	Strongly AGREE
0		1	2	3	4	5

Organizational Direction

I am aware of the vision senior management has for the future of this organization _____

I am aware of the values of this organization _____

I am aware of the overall strategy senior management has for this organization _____

Mission and Values

I believe in the overall purpose of this organization _____

I believe in the values of this organization _____

I believe in the work done by this organization _____

Role Clarity

I understand my goals and objectives and what is required of me in my job _____

I understand how my job contributes to the overall success of this organization _____

During my day-to-day duties I understand how well I am doing _____

Resources

I have access to the right equipment and resources to do my job well _____

I have easy access to all the information I need to do my job well _____

We can get access to additional resources when we need to _____

Processes
There are clear policies and procedures for how work is to be done
In this organization it is clear who has responsibility for what
Our policies and procedures are efficient and well-designed

Not Applicable/ Don't Know		Strongly DISAGREE	Tend To DISAGREE	Mixed Feelings/ Neutral	Tend To AGREE	Strongly AGREE
0		1	2	3	4	5

Technology
Staff in this organization have good skills at using the technology we have _____

Safety
Keeping high levels of health and safety is a priority of this organization _____
We are given all necessary safety equipment and training _____
Staff are aware of their work health and safety responsibilities _____
Supervisors and management engage in good safety behavior _____

Leadership
I have confidence in the ability of senior management _____
Senior management are good role models for staff _____
Senior management keep people informed about what's going on _____
Senior management listen to other staff _____

Learning & Development
When people start in new jobs here they are given enough guidance and training _____
There is a commitment to ongoing training and development of staff _____
The training and development I've received has improved my performance _____

Involvement
I have input into everyday decision-making in this organization _____
I am encouraged to give feedback about things that concern me _____
I am consulted before decisions that affect me are made _____

Not Applicable/ Don't Know		Strongly DISAGREE	Tend To DISAGREE	Mixed Feelings/ Neutral	Tend To AGREE	Strongly AGREE
0		1	2	3	4	5

Rewards & Recognition
The rewards and recognition I receive from this job are fair ____
This organization fulfils its obligations to me ____
I am satisfied with the income I receive ____
I am satisfied with the benefits I receive (super, leave, etc) ____

Performance and Appraisal
My performance is reviewed and evaluated often enough ____
The way my performance is evaluated is fair ____
The way my performance is evaluated provides me with clear guidelines for improvement ____

Customer Satisfaction
This organization offers products and/or services that are high quality ____
This organization understands the needs of its customers ____
Customers are satisfied with our products and/or services ____

Organizational Commitment
I feel a sense of loyalty and commitment to this organization ____
I am proud to tell people that I work for this organization ____
I am willing to put in extra effort for this organization ____

Not Applicable/ Don't Know		Strongly DISAGREE	Tend To DISAGREE	Mixed Feelings/ Neutral	Tend To AGREE	Strongly AGREE
0		1	2	3	4	5

Job Satisfaction
My work gives me a feeling of personal accomplishment ____
I like the kind of work I do ____
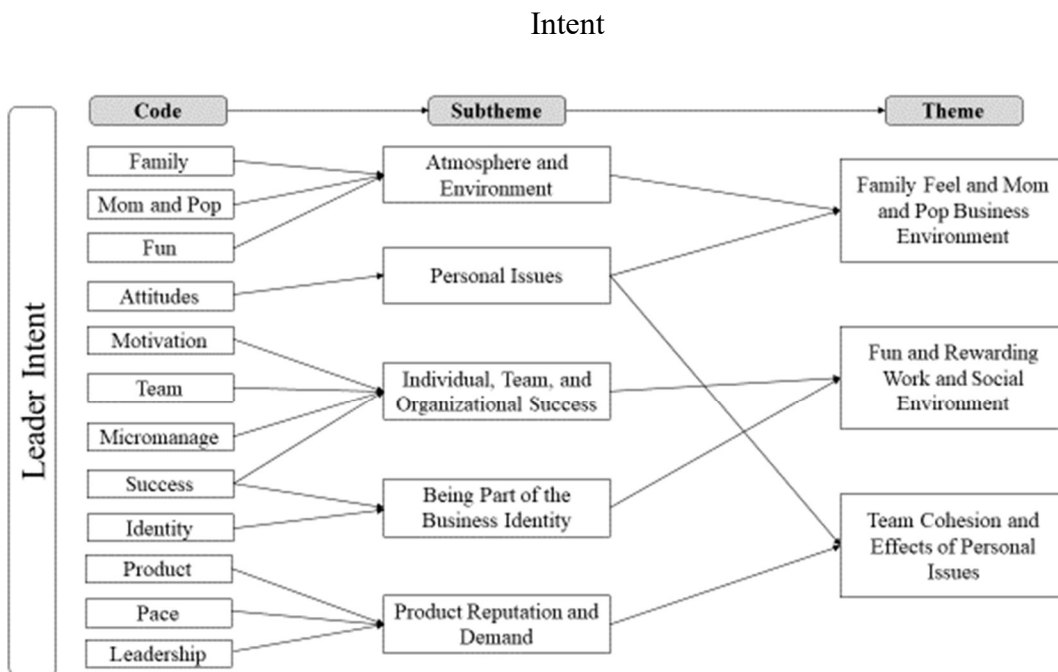Overall, I am satisfied with my job ____

Intention to Stay
I am likely to still be working in this organization in two years' time ____
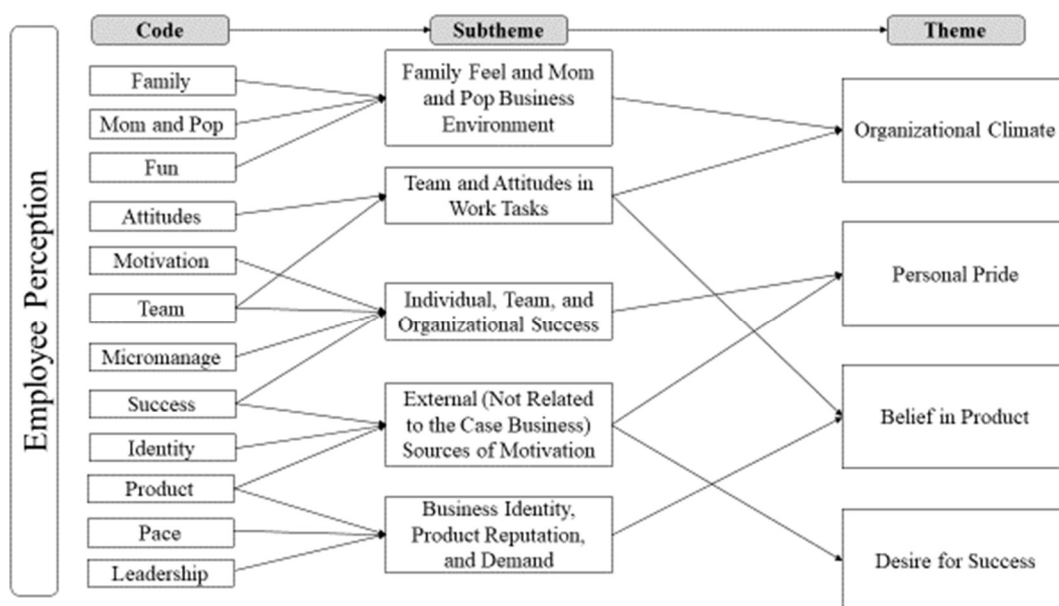I would like to still be working in this organization in five years' time ____
I can see a future for me in this organization ____

Appendix F: Graphical Presentation of Codes into Major Themes Regarding Leader

Intent

Appendix G: Graphical Presentation of Codes into Major Themes Employee Perception

Appendix H: Code Book and Frequencies for Leader Intent

Code	Frequency	Description	Interview Example
Environment	5	Code that identifies the organization as a mom and pop operation opposed to a corporate model. This code also identifies the family feel of the business environment.	"The fact that it's a mom and pop operation. It's not a bunch of corporate [expletive]" (P1).
Communication	3	Code that identifies how respect is articulated as well as how standards, expectations, and feedback is provided to employees.	"[Their] pay is based off of performance. They will get random bonuses when I see him do something really crazy good and without being asked" (P1).
Leadership	6	Code that identifies how team cohesion is addressed, how respect is communicated, and how personal issues are dealt with.	"I'm out of touch with them. As hard as I try to communicate and show them that I respect them, I've just lost touch with them if I ever had it" (P1).

Appendix I: Code Book and Frequencies for Employee Perception

Code	Frequency	Description	Interview Example
Family	13	Code that identifies an employee response linking the work environment to that of a family unit.	"Um, well we have really good food and like everyone feels like a family. Like we get along really well and were able to hang out outside of work" (P2).
Mom and Pop	9	Code that identifies an employee response describing the business model of that of a mom and pop operation as contrasted to that of a big-chain or corporate model.	"I really enjoy the whole mom and pop situation" (P9).
Fun	19	Code that identifies an employee response describing the work atmosphere as a fun one	"It seems like a fun place" (P7).
Micromanagement	9	Code that identifies an employee response stating that they perceive being closely watched or over-controlled in the work environment.	"However, you feel like leadership is focusing too much on micromanaging and the little things rather than building a bigger picture on customer/clientele experience and return" (P4).
Team	10	Code that identifies employees seeing their coworkers and managers as more than independently functioning people or individuals.	"How do I fit in? I'm a team player. I'm also leader" (P19).
Motivation	51	Code that identifies an employee's source of	

		drive or reason for acting a certain way.
Product	9	Code that identifies the business output or what the small business case produces for customers.
Success	9	Code that identifies an employee response identifying a goal, benefit, or outcome in addition to how those elements are obtained.