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Leadership Strategies that Promote Employee Engagement

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Abstract

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BS, Murray State University, 2001

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

In the higher education industry, employee engagement is crucial to the survival of organizations because engaged employees increase profits, productivity, and sustainability. The purpose of this single case study was to explore leadership strategies that leaders of higher education organizations used to promote employee engagement. Expectancy theory was the conceptual framework for this study. Four leaders of a higher education organization in the southeastern United States were purposefully selected for the study based upon their experience implementing effective leadership strategies to promote employee engagement. Data were collected through face-to-face semistructured interviews, direct observation, and review of publicly available organizational documents. Data were transcribed and coded for common patterns and themes, then member-checked to reinforce the validity of the interpretations. Three themes emerged from the data analysis: engaging through communication, developing engagement strategies, and engaging through recognition and rewards. The findings from this study might contribute to social change by providing higher education leaders with strategies to promote a sustainable workforce, competitive edge, and increase productivity and profitability.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my family. I have to first thank God for allowing me to complete this educational journey. To Him I give all the glory and through Him all things are possible. To my mom, Louise Brown, and my dad, Mack Brown, thank you for believing in me; and for your continued love and support. To my other half, Carlos McCutcheon thanks for showing love and being there during those overwhelming times. To my children, Caleb McCutcheon and Tianna McCutcheon, I love you both so much, and please know that if you set your mind to it, then you can do it! I also want to thank my sisters, Melanie Brown and Kristy Brown, for always being there when I needed them and showing love. I could not have done it without you all, love you guys!

Acknowledgments

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

Section 1: Foundation of the Study

For leadership strategies to be effective in higher education, there needs to be commitment and support from current and formal institutional leaders. The institutional leaders can assist in molding employees to the specific institutional context, culture, and foundation by actions (Boncana, 2014; Caniëls, Semeijn, & Renders, 2018). One of the areas of opportunity for change is the sense of entitlement and power struggles that arise from various levels of leadership roles, when working in a collaborative environment (Agarwal, 2018; Boncana, 2014; Hauge, Norenes, & Vedoy, 2014). When leadership strategies and responsibilities are ineffective among staff, it creates a continuous problem (Agarwal, 2018; Boncana, 2014; Hauge et al., 2014).

Background of the Problem

Employee engagement is considered a significant challenge because of increasing competitors' numbers and continuous innovation processes (Dagher, Chapa, & Junaid, 2015). Competition is steadily growing among businesses and the struggle to stay competitive may cause leaders to focus more on employee productivity instead of employee engagement (Anand, 2017). Disengagement could be attributed to general human behavior when individual needs are placed ahead of the collective (Taneja, Sewell, & Odom, 2015). Leadership and relationships have vital roles in organizational success (Walthall & Dent, 2016).

Disengaged employees unsatisfied with the work they perform, are less productive, the quality of work is decreased, and they are more likely to quit, all leading to reduced profits (Dagher et al., 2015). Dagher et al. (2015) noted that an employee is a valuable resource of the company and, is demanding to replace; leaders must give the proper attention to an employee's value and invest as much as required. A need exists to create more leadership strategies to increase employee engagement, which in turn may boost productivity (Anand, 2017). Acquiring a high level of employee engagement within the organization can significantly increase the chances of a company to succeed (Reilly, 2013).

Interpersonal behaviors affect productivity, and organizational leaders have started observing the influence interpersonal behaviors have on productivity (Suhariadi, 2016). Negative interpersonal behaviors could have a negative influence on productivity, which in turn could also lower employee engagement. Interpersonal behaviors in an organization include components of trust and respect, employee and leadership skill building, and teamwork (Nasomboon, 2014). According to Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, and McKibbon (2015), organizational leaders may need to understand how the engagement levels of their employees are affecting their work output; and develop strategies to promote better engagement.

Problem Statement

Employees in the United States are not engaged in workplace activities, and one in five is actively disengaged (Rao, 2017). Only 29% of the workforce is committed, and an estimated $300 billion is lost per year in the United States because of decreased productivity from disengaged employees (Radda, Majidadi, & Akanno, 2015). Unless employees are engaged and productive on a consistent basis, more intelligent and skilled people will not be attracted to the institution (Boncana, 2014; Cheema, Akram, & Javed, 2015; Walthall & Dent, 2016). The general business problem is that companies are losing profits because of disengaged employees. The specific business problem is that some higher education organizational leaders lack leadership strategies to promote employee engagement.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore leadership strategies that higher education sector organizational leaders used to promote employee engagement. The population comprised four West Tennessee higher education sector organization leaders from a single higher education corporation who have implemented leadership strategies to improve employee engagement. The findings from this study could contribute to social change by providing organizations with more information about leadership strategies used to encourage employee engagement. More details on leadership strategies could lead to fewer employee turnovers in an organization, which in turn could increase community stability.

Nature of the Study

I chose the qualitative research method for this study because qualitative research is a means of gathering rich data from personal experiences, which provides a deeper understanding of the participants' viewpoints. Qualitative research gives a platform for researchers to explore different paradigms and styles of research, which reflect the perceptions and experiences of participants (Koivu & Damman, 2015). Quantitative researchers investigate relationships between variables, test hypotheses, study cause-effect phenomenon, and describe conditions (Yin, 2016). A quantitative methodological approach was not the best fit for this study, as there was no hypothesis to test. A mixed-methods approach is a blend of both qualitative and quantitative research; therefore, mixed methods research has surveys and interviews with an analysis of the results on specific issues (Yin, 2016). The mixed method approach was not suitable for this study because it included a quantitative component. In this single case study, the purpose was to identify leadership strategies used to promote employee engagement within higher education.

I chose a qualitative single case study design after considering qualitative designs such as case study, phenomenology, ethnography, and narrative study designs. A single case study was appropriate for the study because it was suitable for small groups, and researchers can explore a phenomenon in a unique environment, as described by Yin (2016). The intent of this case study was to explore leadership strategies senior leaders used to promote employee engagement. The qualitative single case study design was selected instead of a multiple-case design because the focus of this study was one department within a single organization. Also considered for this study were phenomenological, ethnography, and narrative designs.

Phenomenological and ethnographic designs observe perceptions of a lived experience (Koivu & Damman, 2015), which was not the goal of this study. Ethnography researchers narrate views through extended periods of observation of study participants (Zilber, 2014), which due to time constraints was not a realistic design for this study. A narrative design requires a substantial amount of time for researchers to listen to participants' stories (Yates & Leggett, 2016). A narrative design was not appropriate for this study because a narrative design involves sharing detailed accounts of experience; this was not the focus of this study. A qualitative single case study was the most appropriate because the design allows interviewing and observation of participants in a unique environment.

Research Question

The central research question is as follows: What leadership strategies do higher education sector organizational leaders use to promote employee engagement?

Interview Questions

1. What leadership strategies do you use to promote employee engagement?
2. What is your experience using these strategies?
3. What challenges have you experienced using leadership strategies to promote employee engagement?
4. What leadership procedures have you implemented to reward employees for expected performance behaviors?
5. Which of the approaches was the most effective?
6. What other information would you like to discuss regarding your leadership strategies that promote employee engagement?

Conceptual Framework

The objective of this single case study was to explore leadership strategies used to promote employee engagement. The conceptual framework for this study was Vroom’s expectancy theory. Vroom’s (1964) approach included the constructs of positive organizational behavior, including leadership, motivation, and employee engagement.

In Vroom's (1964) theory, motivation to act is defined as a combination of the perceived attractiveness of future outcomes and the likelihood one's actions will lead to those outcomes. In the expectancy theory, an employee's motivation is an outcome of how much an individual wants a reward (valence), the assessment of the likelihood that it will lead to expected performance (expectancy), and the belief that the production will lead to reward (instrumentality; Vroom, 1964). Vroom's expectancy theory, which has been tested in industrial settings extensively, shows abundant promise for applying to an organization's satisfaction, motivation, and the related issues of leadership behavior and employee engagement (Quintana, Park, & Cabrera, 2015). Vroom's expectancy theory (motivation) applied to this study because the leaders drive employee engagement.

Operational Definitions

Commitment: Commitment is an attitude of connection to an organization by an employee that leads to certain job-related behaviors (Hechanova & Waelde, 2017).

Engagement: Employee engagement is a positive attitude held by the employee toward the organization and its values (Anand, 2017).

Organizational culture: Organizational culture is the set of operating principles that determine how people behave within the context of the company (Bell & Njoli, 2016).

Soldiering: Soldiering is a term in which workers deliberately slow down their work and accomplish less than their potential (Deepa, Palaniswamy, & Kuppusamy, 2014).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are those areas within the study presumed correct but which are beyond the control of the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This qualitative single case study included two underlying assumptions. The first assumption was that the participants would be available and would provide clear, honest, and unbiased feedback related to the topic. The second assumption was that the participants would respond based on their lived experiences.

Limitations

Limitations define potential weaknesses or problems with a study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The number of participants in leadership positions willing to participate because of availability was a limitation to the study. The validity of doctoral research was limited to the honesty of the study participants in response to the interviews. Also, time allocations and the environment available for interviewing participants were limited. The study was limited to a single higher education institution in West Tennessee.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the characteristics of the study that limit the scope and define the boundaries of the doctoral research (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The range of this study consisted of four senior leaders within a single higher education sector. These senior leaders were in an active leadership role with a minimum of 5 years' experience dealing with strategies promoting employee engagement. The focus of this single case study was leadership strategies that support employee engagement delimited to the West

Tennessee region of the United States. The data from this e single case study provided insight into leadership strategies to improve employee engagement.

Significance of the Study

The study findings may be of value to businesses to explore leadership strategies used to promote employee engagement. The success of an organization in dealing with job-related tasks depends on the efforts of subordinates (Biggs, Brough, & Barbour, 2014). Engaged employees are assets to their organizations, and disengaged employees can be liabilities. Highly engaged employees make a substantive contribution to their agency and can predict organizational success (Lavigna, 2015). Keeping employees engaged has a positive effect on the financial and performance base of an organization (Owen Nieberding, 2014).

Contributions to Business Practices

This study may contribute to the active practice of business to explore leadership strategies that higher education sector organizational leaders use to promote employee engagement. Organizational leaders who actively work to improve employee engagement outperform competitors in different financial measures (Chaudhry & Shah, 2011; Tsikoudakis, 2013). The increase of employee engagement could increase organizational effectiveness and improve business performance (Leary et al., 2013). When organizational leaders exercise strategies that help the organization grow, this could stimulate corporate sustainability. This study is beneficial to the active practice of business in that it might provide a practical model for higher education organizational leaders, to ensure what leadership strategies some higher education leaders use to promote employee engagement to improve employee performance.

Implications for Social Change

The results of this study may offer a contribution to positive social change by revealing leadership strategies that higher education sector organizational leaders use to promote employee engagement. When business leaders are aware of what motivates employees, they can increase employee engagement, make business decisions favorable to employees, reduce employee turnover, and create more positive economic environments for employees and the community (Leary et al., 2013). Understanding these determinants will help focus efforts on leadership strategies to increase employee engagement

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

A literature review was conducted to establish a foundation for the single case study and research question. The literature review consists of published secondary information on the history, present, and emergent themes supporting the study. The literature review provided in this section has topics and includes a significant theory that builds a logical, conceptual framework for the single case study: Vroom's expectancy theory. I found more than 150 journal articles, books, and dissertations, of which 88are in the literature review. The literature review contains 88 resources, of which 84 are peer-reviewed journal article and four seminal books. The literature review consists of 75sorurces out of 88 (85%) are published within the last 5 years and 84 out of 88 (95%)

are peer-reviewed. The study included 155 resources, in which 151(97%) were peer-reviewed and 131(85%) were published within 5 years.

This qualitative single case study involved relevant data to explore leadership strategies used to promote employee engagement in the workplace. I used the data to provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of the research topic (see Newman et al., 2017). The source of the literature is from Walden University Library's article database and books from the following databases: ABI/INFORM Emerald Management Journals, Business Source Complete, EBSCO, SAGE, Academic Search Complete, and ProQuest Central. Keywords used to search the databases included *employee engagement, leadership theories, transformational and transactional leadership, motivation, Maslow's hierarchy of needs,* and *Vroom's expectancy theory.* The research of the keywords in various databases concluded in scholarly references that related to the conceptual framework.

Vroom's Expectancy Theory

There are many factors to consider when enhancing leadership strategies to promote employee engagement. Because I focused on employee motivation, employee engagement, organizational effectiveness, and leadership strategies, the conceptual framework pertinent to this study was expectancy theory (see Vroom, 1964). The expectancy theory was initially explained by Vroom (1964) as a process motivation theory (Lazaroiu, 2015). Expectancy theory posited that a link exists between employees' perceptions about their ability to perform and their certainty of expectancies. Included in this theory is a formula on how employees make decisions to achieve the rewards they value and pursue, based on the method of motivation = expectancy x instrumentality x valence (Vroom, 1964).

An employee's perception of his or her ability (probability) to accomplish a task is called *expectancy*. Expectancy means that the higher the employees' outlook, the better chance for motivation to occur (Lazaroiu, 2015). If an employee does not believe that he or she can accomplish a task, he or she will not be motivated to make an effort. Likewise, if an employee believes that accomplishing a task will result in a reward, he or she will probably be motivated; this is called *instrumentality* (Maimela & Samuel, 2016). The importance employees place on the prize is called *valence* (HemaMalini & Washington, 2014). An outcome that has high valence would probably result in a better chance of motivation (HemaMalini & Washington, 2014).

Expectancy combined with valence yield a person's motivation or potential for a given course of action. Researchers have indicated that university leaders who allow faculty to negotiate their work expectations are likely to increase faculty work engagement and retention (Maimela & Samuel, 2016). Motivating employees is possible only when a definite relationship exists between the work performed and its results and when the results are means to satisfy a particular need. Expectancy theory continues to be widely held by management (O'Neill, Hodgson, & Mazrouei, 2015).

Another consideration about leadership strategies regarding expectancy theory is the degree to which employees are satisfied with their level of performance and equity of received rewards. In the 1990s, researchers demonstrated that organizational managers using the reinforcement theory increased employee performance by 17% (Abdelkafi &

Tauscher, 2016). Leaders should strive to satisfy the lower levels of the model and focus on a higher psychological maturity of motivation for their subordinates. A link to expectancy theory is equity theory, based on the principle of social comparisons employees make about the level of their work efforts and the way they are treated to compare to others (Maimela & Samuel, 2016).

Perspectives on Employee Motivation

This section includes information regarding employee motivation with insight into what worked for management in the past and present-day. The Industrial Revolution, which began in the United Kingdom in 1750 and spread worldwide, created jobs for millions of people who became dependent on employers for their livelihood (Waite, 2014). However, organizational managers tended to lead by fear and intimidation. Theory x managers relied on extrinsic rewards, such as pay and negative sanctions, to motivate workers to accomplish a task; this often created a working environment that was pure drudgery for the employees who were working 10 to12 hours 6 days a week (Davison & Smothers, 2015). These early managers believed that production came first, not the employees (Waite, 2014).

Negative work conditions may result in a problem for management as workers take out their frustration through reduced job performance. Taylor (1911) called this reaction *soldering* in which workers would deliberately slow down their work and accomplish less than their potential, which resulted in employee termination. This action of employee termination only caused tension; therefore, workers started to organize. The results usually came in the form of an organized union that set out to protect the employees from being overworked, and theory x managers who tended to threaten, humiliate, and harass employees (Harrell-Cook, Levitt, & Grimm, 2017).

The attitudes of the managers of theory x accounted for management believing that wage-labor employees had little commitment to the company and were just there for the money and security that work brought with it. Company management saw the union as a threat and tried to convince the employees that unions would do the employees more harm than good (Saunders & Tiwari, 2014). The difference in views between workers and management can cause trust barriers. However, employees tended to stay with the unions, and when company management refused to negotiate with the unions, violence sometimes was the outcome (Waite, 2014).

The theory x style of management was not a constant trend due to the development of more positive management concepts. Taylor (1911), who initiated vital time and motion studies to analyze work tasks with procedures, believed that the responsibility of management was to design work tasks and enforce them by offering proper pay incentives to the employees rather than using sheer force methods. This development of workers' maximum prosperity meant higher wages, shorter work hours, better work conditions, and the development of each employee. Management should recognize noneconomic incentives for workers, such as promotion, advancement, and managers' friendly interaction with workers (Dent & Bozeman, 2014). Incentives would be a great way for managers to show appreciation to their employees.

Taylor's scientific management became convincing to other advocates in management. Frank and Lillian Gilbreth advocated that management should motivate employees by developing employees to their fullest potential (as cited in Toma, Grigore, & Marinescu, 2014). Some employees want to be challenged, and find it rewarding for managers to recognize it. The famous Hawthorne studies reinforced the new concept of management, in which Elton Mayo added that managers should acquire different leadership skills such as interpersonal skills in counseling and effective two-way communications with employees (as cited in Kuranchie-Mensah & Amponsah-Tawiah, 2016). The work of Mayo and others involved with the Hawthorne studies led to a participatory approach to the way management should treat employees.

The creation of a motivating work environment became a pivotal aspect in determining employee work production and engagement. Motivational theories such as Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs and Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory emphasize the particular requirements met for employees to be satisfied with their jobs. Human behavior is complicated, so organization managers should attempt to understand why employees have different needs, why they often change their needs, and how they go about satisfying their needs (Bhuvanaiah & Raya, 2015). In addition to Maslow and Vroom, other motivation process theories developed that emphasize how employees choose a behavior to fulfill their needs. Job efforts are likely to increase if employees' expectations fulfilled. A motivation theory called Locke's (1968) goal-setting theory, attempts to identify employees' specific needs or values most conducive to job satisfaction (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). These motivational theories are useful to managers and offer more practical principles.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Some leaders believe that employees may be motivated based on individual needs. Maslow (1943) identified five levels of human needs and labeled them physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization. Physiological needs are the most significant needs for humans and self-actualization is the least (Maslow, 1943).

Physiological needs. The physiological needs include the necessities that human beings require such as air, water, and food. This need has been apparent since the creation of man (Moorer, 2014). It would be virtually impossible for the next level of needs to be obtained, as the necessities of life must first be met (Maslow, 1943). Physiological needs are the greatest needs for humans.

Safety needs. The safety needs are around security and well-being for one's self, and for those loved and cared about daily. Soni and Soni (2016) debated that if individuals cannot ascertain a level of safety in the work environment, then everything else around them fails because of the need to be kept safe. Safety needs also refer to the senses of possible physical and emotional harm that must be resolved to achieve the next level of well-being. Safety needs are continually changing in both the workplace and home life scenarios, which make the feeling of being safe-tarnished (Soni & Soni, 2016). As numerous researchers have contended, with the differences of generational cohorts and the types of influencing tactics used over the years, the sense of safety might be confounded as employers attempt to recruit, retain, and train employees (Maslow, 1943; Moorer, 2014; Vanagas & Adomas, 2014).

Social needs. Individuals can acquire a need for love and friendship. Social needs are about a feeling of belonging to a group or individual (Maslow, 1943). For some employees, establishing relationships are essential in the work environment for motivational factors. The connection of belonging is necessary not to alienate oneself but to embrace and encourage a sense of belonging (Moorer, 2014).

Esteem needs. Esteem needs reveal an individual's aspiration to gain respect from other people and to preserve a level of self-esteem (Maslow, 1943). Esteem needs can be fulfilled by elements including accomplishment, recognition, self-respect, social status, and perhaps attention of other people for a job well done which goes back to the realization of esteem (Moorer, 2014). Without meeting esteem needs, negativity can arise on oneself.

Self-actualization. Self-actualization is the realization of who a person is and how one sustains this realization of complete happiness (Vanagas & Adomas, 2014). Vanagas and Adomas (2014) described individuals that want to be capable of more is evident throughout generations. For example, a leader may look upon another leader and want what he or she has whether follower loyalty, commitment, or dedication. Before a leader can achieve self-actualization, the leader must meet the needs of safety, love, physiological, and esteem (Vanagas & Adomas, 2014).

(Maslow (1943) indicated that when the lower needs are satisfied the individual is content until the next level of needs are attained thus engaging a higher level of demand for satisfaction in the next level of the hierarchy. Soni and Soni (2016) analyzed particular positions within the management and leadership functions to show that unless the lower level needs are satisfied, the higher level needs are not achievable. Leadership should be sure that they meet employees physiological and safety needs first. Vroom's

(1964) expectancy theory is similar to Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. However, there should be a clear understanding regarding how to determine the needs of individual employees and how to distinguish when those needs change

Equity theory. Employees are motivated when treated fairly (Harrell-Cook et al., 2017). When an employee perceives that his or her level of input and rewards, as compared to the level of data and bonuses of a coworker, are not fair or equitable, tensions could rise, and employees could attempt to find balance by requesting and receiving an increase in compensation, pay, or rewards. However, if the increase in salary or bonuses is not perceived as equitable by the employee, there will be no motivation effect, and the employee may decrease his or her level of effort toward work or pursuing the organization's goal and objectives (Kumar & Pansari, 2015).

The decrease in motivation effect could happen more often in more significant groups in which all members are paid the same regardless of individual performance because social loafing is more likely to occur in more vital as opposed to smaller groups. The equity theory gives managers insight into an essential motivation principle based on an ethical and moral level (Connelly, 2014). The field of industrial and organizational psychology literature addressed how employees performed goals under different conditions that management created for them. Locke's (1968) goal-setting theory provided insight into how goal-setting could offer a positive outlook on employees.

Goal-setting theory. Locke (1968) theorized that employees could be motivated by setting clear goals and receiving appropriate feedback that could improve employee performance and organization performance. To be effective, employees must participate in the process of goal setting, which will allow them to understand the meaning of the outcomes and how the issues affect both the organization and employees themselves (Bhuvanaiah & Raya, 2015). Encouraging employees involved with the goal-setting process results in a high probability that they will understand the consequences of the goal objectives, and doing so will gain employees' approval. Valid feedback becomes a critical component of the goal-setting process to maintain employees' motivation, especially when aiming to stretch goal attainment (Valizade, Ogbonnaya, Tregaskis, & Forde, 2016).

By providing valuable feedback, management can create an environment in which employees have high-performance goals. Positive feedback can affect both the organization and employees' professional and personal performances (Arraya, Pellissier, & Preto, 2015). Higher performances can occur when employees have a goal that requires the acquisition of knowledge to complete. Organizational managers should understand the factors associated with engaged employees and promote the type of empowerment that encourages employees to want to engage with their work (Saks & Gruman, 2014).

Employee Engagement

Leadership has brought much interest regarding employee engagement. In 1990, William Kahn presented the meaning of employee engagement, the harnessing of employees to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances (Kahn, 1990). There are links discovered on leadership and productivity output. Researchers continue to collect an abundance of observed evidence that links leadership actions (behaviors) to employee productivity (Inauen, 2014). Karanges, Johnston, Beatson, and Lings (2015) stated that practitioners first indicated information on employee engagement, but enthusiasm rises from academic researchers who correlate employee engagement with behavior-performance criteria.

Leadership strategies vary on a positive and negative affect on employees' behaviors. Even though researchers have been seeking to reveal specific patterns of management that link employee sentiment to organizational performance, the nature of their findings has yet to surface in the business world (see Harrell-Cook et al., 2017; Kahn, 1990; Wai Lam, Liu, & Loi, 2016). Engagement is an experiential state, which enabled employees to draw deeply on their selves in role performances to address the challenges inherent in their work roles (Kahn, 1990). At times, employees seek specific traits within the workplace to enhance their engagement on the job. These traits are tangible items such as incentives, but also the positive influence of leadership can be very encouraging.

Trust in the leader, support from the leader, and creating a blame-free environment is components of psychological safety which enable employee engagement. Building on Kahn's (1990) theory is a three-dimensional concept of engagement that includes the dimensions of vigor, dedication, and absorption (Fletcher, 2016). Overlapping conceptually with Kahn's work on engagement, Sambrook, Jones, and Doloriert (2014) defined engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. These characteristics bring a positive strategy towards improving employee engagement. Inauen (2014) distinguished between three broad conceptualizations of employee engagement: state, trait, and behavioral engagement. Employee engagement is an addition of the self to a role as an employee.

Engaged employees have a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, absorption and a sense of energetic and active connection with their work activities. Engaged employees also exhibit positive job attitudes and appear to perform better than those who are less involved (Sambrook et al., 2014). The employees see themselves as able to deal well with the demands of their jobs. Employee engagement is more than pure job satisfaction. Disengaged employees or employees who are burned out can be a severe liability for an organization (Sushil, 2014). Such employees neither work with passion nor possess a profound connection to their organization, and as a result, employee disengagement can lead to resentment, powerlessness, or even anger toward their work and the organization (Pattakos & Dundon, 2017).

Business organization has revealed evidence on how employee engagement can affect the workplace. The Gallup Organization has completed studies on employee engagement and, in doing so, revealed several factors that create a work culture of engaged employees (Sambrook et al., 2014). The Gallup research identified 12 core elements that best predict employee engagement (Sambrook et al., 2014). Employees know expectations of them and have clear but reasonable expectations of their job responsibilities (Sushil, 2014). The employees have the materials and equipment to do their work, and they receive recognition and praise for their work. Employees have a best friend at work and have a supervisor who discusses their performance, the employees believe their job matters, and they believe their opinions count (Sushil, 2014).

Successfully changing the culture of the organization occurs when stakeholders understand the goals of the organization. A critical factor involved with employee engagement is the organization's senior leadership's sincere interest in the employees to learn, develop, contribute, and grow (Popli & Rizvi, 2016). Employees who think a part of the workplace fabric have the potential for achieving better performance. Management should take measures to identify the level of employee engagement within the organization and implement a strategy to create a work environment that promotes employees' full emotional involvement to improve performance (Long, Yusof, Kowang, & Heng, 2014). The Gallup studies indicated that, when organizational leadership takes this strategy, the results are reduced employee turnover, more productivity, increased profits, and customer loyalty (Sambrook et al., 2014).

Employee engagement is starting to become a noticeable factor to business organizations. The Tower Perrin organization developed an employee engagement survey based on the three dimensions of rational, emotional, and motivational engagement (Strom, Sears, & Kelly, 2014). Rational refers to how well employees understand their work roles and responsibilities, emotional relates to passion and energy employees have toward their work, and motivational refers to how well employees perform in their roles. The study was conducted with global companies over one year and revealed that the organizations with higher employee engagement levels had higher revenues or profits and employee retention rates that those companies with low employee engagement levels (Sambrook et al., 2014). The studies also revealed that engaged employees displayed a willingness and ability to contribute to the organization in the form of extra time, brainpower and energy for mission success (Sushil, 2014).

LSA Global, a global training and consulting firm that focuses on achieving measurable business results conducted research on employee engagement. A lack of employee engagement adversely affects the financial performance of a company. Increasing employee engagement within the workforce is a critical factor influencing company profitability. The researchers also found that an employee seems to be highly engaged because he or she works long hours by choice and thoroughly enjoys his or her work does not mean this behavior satisfies the company's leadership (O'Neill et al., 2015). A sign of disengagement could be if the project the employee is devoted to lacks relevance or is disconnected from the company's current business strategic plan. Otherwise, for an organization to benefit from employees work efforts, the employees need to be engaged in projects aligned with the organization's goals and priorities (O'Neill et al., 2015).

Organizational leaders have a great influence on an employee level of engagement. Employees have expressed difficulties in be engaged with work unless an organization's leadership team is involved (Popli & Rizvi, 2016). Leadership should evaluate each employee and recognize strengths and weaknesses. A Gallup Business Journal (2013) study showed that a majority of employees stated they wanted opportunities to grow in their jobs. The study also found that a robust manager-employee relationship is a critical factor in employee engagement, and that management must ensure visible follow-up to employee engagement surveys (Owen Nieberding, 2014).

Organizational leaders should not be scared to lead because it limits employee engagement. Limiting engagement could force employees to withdraw from being productive, and can lead to disengagement or burnout (Hoon Song, Hun Lim, Gu Kang, & Kim, 2014). When employees become disengaged with work, they become more concerned about their welfare instead of the organization. A workplace of disengaged employees generates excessive employee turnover, confusion, wasted effort and talent, loss of commitment, and financial loss that can lead to the ruin of the organization (Owen Nieberding, 2014).

Organizations that focus on employee engagement may increase job performance levels. A study conducted by Watson Wyatt Worldwide about HR practices of 50 large U.S. firms showed that organizations with top performing measurements focus on engaging their employees (Medlin & Green, 2014). According to the results of the research, top organizations value good employees, thereby reducing the turnover of good employees and leading to top business performance and engagement. High employee engagement can lead to innovation, increased production, higher-quality products or service, less waste, customer satisfaction, and higher profits (Kaur, 2017). Such findings are significant because employee engagement could be affected by frequent customer contact.

The behaviors of corporate leaders may be measured to determine the extent to which these behaviors influence employee engagement. The effect of leadership strategies has been known to affect work productivity (Mendez, Howell, & Bishop, 2015). Leadership should influence others in a shared direction. Leaders may bring to the job various attitudes, beliefs, values, customs, and morals, which are all instrumental in shaping how leaders think, lead, and make decisions that influence their subordinates (Fletcher, 2016). Researchers of organizational behavior have long been interested in exploring how employees' perceptions of their leaders change their work-related thoughts and actions (Wai Lam et al., 2016).

Organizational nature is classified by and through a company’s management systems. Culture is the outcome of an organizations management paradigm, which is a function of an organization’s systemic practice (Meng, 2014). Management theory continues to evolve through modern researches to further gain knowledge of the traits that drive organizational performance. Wai Lam et al. (2016) indicated past leadership studies focused on the person, the area of leadership is emerging outside the person as a leader and including a more holistic view of leadership capabilities and their influence on the internal and external business environment.

Leadership should study employee work engagement to produce a work environment that prompts and motivates employees to action. Employee engagement has emerged as an essential factor in the quest for organizational mission success and is gaining popularity among a variety of organizations (Thompson, Lemmon, & Walter, 2015). Communicating the organization mission and setting clear goals are the initial elements that drive employee engagement. When employees are empowered and find meaning in their work, are more likely to be engaged with their work, contributing to stronger organizational performance (Mishra, Boynton, & Mishra, 2014). When employees are proud of being a member of the organization, they are more likely to be more highly motivated and committed to the organization's success (Owen Nieberding, 2014).

Organizations will succeed if leadership competencies stimulate employee engagement. Companies need to understand how to build and reward management practices and leadership behavior that engage the workforce more effectively (Karanges et al., 2015). In a challenging business environment, organizations are striving to thrive and not just survive in the competitive business world. Engaged employees are more likely to be high performers who exceed performance expectations and adapt in the face of difficulty and impending organizational change (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). An organization with an engaged employee workforce will provide more focus on organizational needs, work quality, and strengthening organizational goals (Mishra et al., 2014).

Leadership Concepts

Leadership development is needed for success, but some leaders have a natural instinct when it comes to leading. Major research approaches focused on the belief that leaders had certain heroic leadership traits and natural abilities associated with heroes, royalty, military generals, and leaders of nations (Winston & Fields, 2015). Such leaders influenced people to follow them based on the leaders' inherited traits, qualities, characteristics, and abilities. Critical determinants of employee motivation could stem from leadership styles and strategies. Elements of these theories apply to the study of leadership (Taylor, Cornelius, & Colvin, 2014).

Leadership has been an important attribute for several years. Historical researchers considered such traits as characteristics, as intelligence, height, energy, self-confidence, honesty, and drive in an attempt to determine whether a universal set of leadership effectiveness characteristics existed (Fiedler, 1967; Stogdill, 1948; Taylor, 1911). Leaders' personality traits and abilities distinguish successful leaders from non-leaders. Implementing such attributes was found not to be sufficient to guarantee effective leadership (Harrell-Cook et al., 2017). Stogdill (1948) noted many of the same leadership traits in the original trait studies conducted from 1904 to 1948 and added some leadership traits such as interpersonal skills, ability to enlist cooperation, tact, assertiveness, and being enthusiastic. Even with decades of research, a challenge to define leadership varies from organization to organization.

The leadership trait theory did not systematize the critical leadership traits needed for success. The leadership trait theory did provide a foundation for the field of leadership studies and is still referenced (Harrell-Cook et al., 2017). However, possession of leadership traits does not guarantee leadership success. For example, leadership research indicates that the trait approach facilitates the selection of managers with a proactive trait personality needed for effective, meaningful change for adaption and long-term organization survival (Fadol, Barhem, & Elbanna, 2015). If organizations aspire to become effective at achieving mission goals, managers must learn the basics about human personality (Ugoani, 2015).

Some aspects of a manager's personality can predict leadership work engagement or burnout. According to Bell and Njoli (2016), one model of character that managers can study is the big five of personality, which includes dimensions of urgency (extroversion), adjustment (neuroticism), agreeableness (getting along with people), conscientiousness (trait related to achievement), and openness to experience (willingness to change and try new things). Leaders exercise leadership styles, behaviors, and strategies in the workforce for the success of the organization. The most important personality traits predicting work engagement are conscientiousness and neuroticism, and those affecting burnouts are neuroticism (Handa & Gulati, 2014).

Transformational leaders possess a variety of personality traits to prove their effectiveness as a leader. Personality traits such as extroversion, intuition, and perception were positively related to a transformational leadership style (Hwang, Quast, Center, Chung, Hahn, & Wohkittel, 2015). The personality trait of a strong internal focus on the loss of control over external events and personality hardiness can affect the development of an organizational manager as a transformational leader (Aleksic, 2016). Transformational leaders gain the trust, and confidence of the subordinates while establishing a shared vision and serving as role models.

In addition to personality differentiating between effective and ineffective managers, other traits such as integrity, trust, and ethical behavior can also relate to active managers' leadership styles. To reduce deviant and unethical behavior within an organization, managers display leadership that provides a model for employees that promotes an environment of trust, integrity, and ethical behavior (Asencio, 2016).

Integrity, trust and values-based leadership foster organizational beliefs and norms that guide an employee's internalized values behavior. Research by Asencio (2016) revealed that employees trust in an organization's leadership is important for efficiency and effectiveness. Also, Hough, Green, and Plumlee (2015) revealed that employees' trust in management promotes employee work engagement.

One way managers can instill trust among employees is by empowering and supporting them to be involved in the decision-making process. One method to effectiveness is a manager maintaining trust with employees and demonstrating the value of the employees beyond merely what they do for the organization (Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014). When managers take the time to develop a trusting relationship with employees, the results are a success in pursuing the organization's goals and objectives for performance (Ugwu, Onyishi, & Rodríguez-Sánchez, 2014). Empowering leadership will allow subordinates to take the initiative and ask for direction as needed. Treating employees respectfully builds employee work engagement and balances the organization's mission and developing leadership strengths (Landis, Hill, & Harvey, 2014).

When managers display credibility and leadership skills deemed trustworthy, they can build a relationship with employees. The employees will then believe the organization honestly and emotionally care about them (Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014). The ability to understand employee emotions is associated with leadership emergence, affects employee motivation, and thereby enhances the organization effectiveness (Handa & Gulati, 2014). Understanding the feelings of employees is a critical factor in emotional expression. A vital leadership skill that has emerged as being important in the success of organizational managers is the concept of emotional intelligence (Gooty, Gavin, Ashkanasy, & Thomas, 2014). Emotional Intelligence has been and will continue to be a useful skill in leadership.

Emotional Intelligence

As a manager takes on increased leadership responsibilities, emotional intelligence becomes another attribute that appears to be an essential factor for success. Emotional intelligence includes adaptive interpersonal and intrapersonal emotional functioning such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management (Fernandez-Berrocal, Extremera, Lopes, & Ruiz-Aranda, 2014). Such skills as being aware of one’s strengths and weaknesses regarding emotions, moods, and temperament are critical in dealing with employees and allow managers to adjust their leadership approach to create a positive effect. Kotzé and Nel (2015) supported the notion that a leader’s high emotional intelligence skills are related to their performance and organization profitability.

Emotional intelligence has a significant positive effect on an employee’s attitude toward work. A manager’s attitude toward employees influences leadership behavior interactions that can have a profound impact on employee morale and organizational effectiveness (Ljungholm, 2014). Such research results are relevant because they demonstrate that competence effects employee commitment and satisfaction and the organization’s success. Organizations that integrate emotional intelligent leadership into their culture can realize a definite link to employee engagement (Gürbüz, Sahin, &

Köksal, 2014). Existing literature marks the notion that a manager's assumptions about employees influence the nature and methods of the manager's leadership style. McGregor (1960) identified two sets of assumptions about human nature, theory x, and theory y, which outlined a manager's leadership attitude toward employees' work.

Theory X and Y

A theory x attitude leadership style refers to those managers who believe workers are lazy, not motivated to work, and have a natural tendency to avoid responsibility. A manager with a theory x attitude believes workers must be coerced, directed, or threatened to get the task completed. Theory x managers think that employees are motivated only by physiological and safety needs as described in Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Harrell-Cook et al., 2017). A manager with a theory x leadership attitude is more likely to rely on formalized policies, rules, and regulations to encourage workers to complete their tasks. Some research has indicated that managers with a theory x leadership style may rely on micro-managing employees and only participate in monologue conversations, which could grow to be disruptive to any creative processes employees may have to offer (Gürbüz et al., 2014). Such beliefs and leadership behavior can be dehumanizing to employees (Harrell-Cook et al., 2017).

Managers that portray theory y leadership have a more positive outlook on employees. McGregor (1960) posited that employees would perform better by working with managers with a theory y leadership attitude, which assumes that employees are independently motivated, seek responsibility, and are willing to exercise imagination and creativity to solve organizational problems. Suggestions were made on changing managers' theory x attitude than their theory x behavior. A manager with a theory y leadership attitude is people-oriented and concerned with relationships within the workplace (Harrell-Cook et al., 2017).

Managers are more likely to be successful in a theory y approach instead of theory x. A theory y-oriented manager would be more likely to take actions that enable employees to have more discretion (Gürbüz et al., 2014). In the management of professional workers, managers leaning toward the theory y attitude tend to achieve higher performance from their subordinates (Harrell-Cook et al., 2017). While theory x and theory y managers appear to operate on assumptions about employees' opposites, the premises may not lie at extremes on a scale.

Sometimes a combination of both theory x and theory y makes sense to use under different conditions presented to the manager. Gürbüz et al. (2014) found that a theory x or y leadership attitude approach can be equally valid depending on the situation. Ideas underlying theory x and y attitudes continue to permeate discussions of leadership studies and are relevant to the concept of organization success (Gürbüz et al., 2014). As increased thoughts continued with this theory, further research was on the attitudes and responsibilities of the employees.

Theory Z

In contrast to McGregor's theory x and y leadership attitudes, theory z management was developed. Ouchi (1981) presented a theory z management focus that places more reliance on the view and responsibilities of the workers. According to Ouchi, theory z focuses on employees employed for life and their managers' genuine care about personal experiences. Theory z involves more reliance on the attitude and responsibilities of the employees, placing them in the environment of a working group and the organization culture doing so gives employees a sense of self-value and feeling that they are essential in achieving the mission of the organization (Harrell-Cook et al., 2017).

Theory z deviates from McGregor's theory x and theory y because it does not view matters from the managerial attitude perspective. Theory z also confirms that ideas can come from management and employees alike (Ouchi, 1981). Theory z managerial leadership approach can contribute significantly to an organization's success and should be respected as a viable leadership approach (Landis et al., 2014). Although research has found that different leadership attitudes, traits, and abilities distinguish successful leaders from non-leaders, the leadership trait theory alone was not sufficient to guarantee effective leadership (Harrell-Cook et al., 2017). Managers developed different styles of leadership through leadership contingency concepts.

Leadership Contingency Concepts

The study of leadership contingency concepts guided research into systematically addressing manager's leadership style. Secondary characteristics and situational elements in determining how these components affect one another and how leaders are active in different situations are factors of this concept (McCleskey, 2014). The basic premise of these approaches is that, if leaders understand the factors that affect employee morale and performances and apply that understanding successfully, they can have more direct influence and control overconfidence and production (Engle et al., 2017). A leader's ability to identify negative factors among their employees will benefit organizations.

Research on leadership has been constant for decades. Four of the more well-known contingency concepts are the leadership contingency theory of Fiedler (1967), the path-goal theory of House (1971), the Vroom and Yetton (1973) leadership theory and the situational leadership model of Hersey and Blanchard (1982). These studies examined how different situations call for a different method of leadership behavior. Fiedler proposed that using the best style of leadership is not a matter of finding the best form but the most technique style for a particular situation (Harrell-Cook et al., 2017).

Fred Fiedler studied the personality and characteristics of leaders. Fiedler proposed two leadership styles that were either task-oriented or people oriented (McCleskey, 2014). Fiedler also suggested that a leader's effectiveness depended on three primary situational variables that determine whether a given situation is favorable to leaders. The variable is: (a) leader-member relations in which employees trust, accept, respect, and have confidence in their leader; (b) the degree of structure of the assigned task performed; and (c) whether the leader's position of power is strong or weak (Salicru & Chelliah, 2014). Fiedler (1967) suggested that task-oriented leaders are most effective in work environments where they either have control or very little control. Conversely, relations-oriented leaders are most effective when the situational power is moderate.

The motivational state of some leaders may be consistent and unchanged. Fiedler argued that a leader's motivation is a stable trait that is not subject to alteration or adaption; therefore, suggesting a leadership position within a familiar leadership style. If this action is not feasible, altering one or more of the three situational variables until a fit with the leader is achieved could be possible (McCleskey, 2014). Fiedler’s contingency theory may not be the most popular theory; however, detailed research has supported specifications of the approach. Fiedler’s contingency theory still has a high impact on the understanding of leadership effectiveness although interest has turned to newer and better situational leadership theories (Landis et al., 2014). The leadership model of Hersey and Blanchard (1982) addressed some shortfalls of Fiedler’s contingency theory (Latham, 2014).

Situational Leadership Model

At times, managers may adjust leadership styles based on different situations that arise in workplace. Hersey and Blanchard (1982) theorized that there was no best way to lead and be useful, but managers should adapt to a given situation and modify their leadership styles through a task and relationship-oriented leadership approaches (Luo & Liu, 2014). Hersey and Blanchard defined task behavior as occurring when a leader outlines the specific details of the job and responsibilities of an employee or group. Relationship behavior was described as the socio-emotional support at a manager’s levels of readiness (McCleskey, 2014).

Employees’ readiness levels are based on a mixture of their abilities and willingness to complete a task. The readiness level (a) Level R1: Unable and insecure or unwilling – the employee may be hesitant about completing the task because of his or her skills. Being unwilling is an indicator of motivation and willingness to perform (b) Level R2: Unable but confident or willing – and employee may be willing to do the job but unable to do so because he or she has never performed the work or had a chance to demonstrate an ability to do so. The next level (c) Level R3: Able but unwilling – the employee may be reluctant to do the job because of attitude change, the reward expected, or critical problems or because performing the task seems to be a punishment to him or her. The last level R4: Able, confident, and willing – once an employee reaches the R4 level, he or she has high levels of ability blended with confidence, commitment, and a sense of ownership, so he or she is motivated and desires to complete the job (Luo & Liu, 2014).

Based on the readiness level of employees, managers can adjust their work styles or relationship leadership styles to accommodate the readiness level of their subordinates (McCleskey, 2014). A manager helps by choosing from four leadership styles plotted on two distinct axes. The first style (a) Style S1: High task/low relationship, in which the leader defines the employee’s responsibilities by prescribing the particulars of who, what, when, and how concerning the job. The next style (b) Style S2: High task/high relationship, in which the leader focuses on explaining and coaching the employee to increase understanding of the job. The third style (c) Style S3: High relationship/low task, in which the leader provides support and boosts the employee’s willingness to complete the mission. (d) Style S4: Low relationship/low task, in which the leader delegates responsibility to the employee and is available to the employee if needed (Luo & Liu, 2014).

The situational leadership model proposes that there is no one best way to influence employees so that any influencing behavior may be more or less effective depending on the performance readiness of the employee or the team. The situational leadership model also has been used to show managers how balancing organizational effectiveness is coupled with recognizing the need for employee satisfaction as with theory y and z leadership (Latham, 2014). Although the situational leadership model methodological grounds, it remains one of the better-known theories of leadership. According to Latham (2014) the situational leadership theory has a commonsense approach that is easy for practitioners to grasp.

Path-Goal Theory

Leaders may adjust their behaviors to meet the needs of employees' goals. House's (1971) path-goal leadership model specifies that leadership strategies can change worker performance and comfort. The path-goal leadership model indicates that a manager's leadership strategies can influence worker performance and satisfaction. The path-goal leadership model suggests that a manager's leadership strategies can affect worker performance and achievement by paving a path, providing rewards employees' value and desire, and encouraging them to achieve both personal and organizational goals (McCleskey, 2014). Leadership behavior tailors to a situation that could be handled effectively through the path-goal theory.

A directive leadership style includes giving employees schedules, rules, policies, and procedures of the specific task to complete at particular times. Supportive leadership behavior describes having concern for employees' general well-being and creating a non-threatening work environment that can increase employees' tasks are stressful, tedious, or dangerous (Salicru & Chelliah, 2014). The leadership behavior classification, participation, the manager consults with the employees and takes their ideas and suggestions into account when making decisions. This leadership approach of engagement is considered best when the employees have the necessary work skills and are ready and willing to be empowered.

The last behavior classification, achievement-oriented leadership, refers to setting challenging goals and objectives for the employees to pursue. With this style, the manager shows confidence in employees' ability to succeed (Salicru & Chelliah, 2014). In summary, the path-goal theory is important because it gives insight into some ways a manager's leadership style can assist employees in achieving the organization's goals while increasing employee satisfaction (Harrell-Cook et al, 2017). The Vroom and Yetton leadership theory will provide some similar traits along with a decision-making process.

Vroom and Yetton Leadership Theory

Instead of enforcing all guidelines through management, some managers like to gain employees point of view. In 1973, Vroom and Yetton published a leadership theory that shares some basic principles with the path-goal leadership theory (Harrell-Cook et al., 2017). The Vroom and Yetton leadership model is more constricted in its focus; it focuses explicitly on the leader involving employees in the decision-making process and interest in the organizational members at higher levels, with corporate decision-making and empowerment being shared (Shyji & Santhiyavalli, 2014). The model presents in the form of a decision tree or flow chart that applies rules relevant to a specific decision-making situation. To increase prescriptive validity, five additional situational factors were introduced to correct some of the weakness in the original model, specifically by using linear equations rather than decision rules (McCleskey, 2014). Two are autocratic (A1 and A2), two are consultative (C1 and C2) and one is Group based (G2). A1: Leader takes known information and then decides alone; A2: Leader gets information from followers, and then decides alone; C1: Leader shares problem with followers individually, listens to ideas and then decides alone; C2: Leader shares problems with followers as a group, looks to ideas and then decides alone; G2: Leader shares problems with followers as a group and then seeks and accepts consensus agreement (Vroom & Yetton, 1973).

Some leadership theories are easier to follow than others. Despite any limitations such as the extended theory somewhat complicated, the path-goal leadership theory made a positive contribution to the study of leadership (Landis et al., 2014). Investigations have led to leadership influence theories more suited for a more knowledge-oriented environment (Marx, 2015). One of these theories is that of charismatic leadership, which development comes from the path-goal leadership theory.

Charismatic Leadership

Managers who have a positive influential impact on employees may receive positive outcomes on performance. Charismatic leadership is thought to have unique qualities that differentiate it from a bureaucratic leadership style (Yang, Tsai, & Liao, 2014). A charismatic leadership style influences employees to achieve improved performance. This style relies more on fostering an image of extraordinary competence through a high degree of self-confidence high energy, strong convictions, solid communication skills, current image building, and personal risk-taking (Dimitrov, 2015).

A charismatic leader has the unique ability to inspire and communicate a compelling vision to pursue organizational goals. A person displaying a charismatic leadership style builds confidence, conveys firm conviction about ideas, has a robust oratorical ability, and presents a powerful aura among followers (Dimitrov, 2015). Charismatic leaders are rare and have been known to emerge in a social crisis. Not all charismatic leadership is decisive, especially when a person abuses power for personal objectives rather than for the mission of the organization (Dimitrov, 2015).

Power controlling managers are becoming outdated. Managers who want to use effective leadership styles are moving away from those styles that emphasize power over employees to a leadership style that focuses on mutual power and influence, such as the displayed in transformational leadership (Waite, 2014). Charismatic leadership positively associates with employee work engagement. Although the behaviors of charismatic and transformational leaders may appear to be similar, charisma is only part of the transformational leadership style (Milosevic & Bass, 2014).

Transformational and Transactional Leadership

At times it may be beneficial for managers to change leadership styles to adapt to certain conditions. Transformational leadership was first proposed by Burns (1978) to explain direction in politics (Waite, 2014). In 1978, Burns introduced the concept of transformational leadership style as a theory that provides a model to assist in shaping the work environment and the commitment of employees (Burns, 1978). Change has become a consistent trait in dealing with business, and at times is much needed. The core of the transformational leadership style is the person's ability to raise employees' awareness and expectations to reach a better level of success and goals than previously thought possible (Aleksic, 2016).

A manager with a transformational leadership style can communicate a vision. The manager can also relate the importance and value of the employees' work to the vision, thus such leaders can inspire employees through Maslow's needs hierarchy toward self-actualization for extraordinary performance (Mason, Griffin, & Parker, 2014). By being able to influence employees, transformational leaders inspire and challenge employees to take ownership of their work and bring about significant change in the organization. A manager displaying a transformational leader can engage employees with a sense of purpose and the knowledge that their work has meaning (Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017).

In contrast, a transactional leadership style is a transaction or exchange between leaders and employees. However, it may not generate enthusiasm and commitment to the task (Holten & Brenner, 2015). A transactional leader influences by offering or denying rewards based on employees' productivity. If the employee performs well, a person displaying a transactional leadership style reinforces that behavior by giving an extrinsic reward, such as a pay increase.

If an employee's performance is below expectation, a transactional leader may respond by withholding any rewards and monitoring the employee's return to detect deviances from standards. Managers displaying a transactional leadership style offer or deny rewards based on employee productivity (Harrell-Cook et al., 2017). This action may influence employees to work harder and establish productivity goals. A transactional leadership style focuses on the present, efficiency, and stability rather than influencing change (Holten & Brenner, 2015).

Managers displaying a transformational leadership style empower employees, offer support, and encourage creativity. The transformational leader style challenge employees to rethink old ways of doing business and re-examine old assumptions, and reinforce positive behavior by recognizing and acknowledging employee accomplishments and celebrating small wins (Aleksic, 2016). Such leadership inspires and stimulates employees to achieve extraordinary performance and encourages them to regard their jobs as challenging and essential. Transformational leadership behavior relates to building a strong organizational culture that enhances employee empowerment, to make employees less dependent on the leader (Ugwu et al., 2014).

Transformational leaders can be found in any organization at any level, and are universally relevant for all types of situations. The components of transformational leadership can be measured with the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Hwang et al., 2015). The original formulation of transformational leadership included three components: idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Hawng et al., 2015). Idealized influence is leadership behavior that provides a role model that is respected, admired, and trusted by followers. The idealized influence leadership behavior includes two aspects: the leader’s behavior and the elements that the followers attribute to the leader (Aleksic, 2016). Intellectual stimulation is leadership behavior that increases follower awareness of problems and influences followers to view issues and situations from a new perspective and to be creative in developing new solutions. Individualized consideration includes the leader providing support and encouragement and acting as a coach or mentor for followers.

A revision of the formulation has added another transformational leader behavior called inspirational motivation. Inspirational motivation includes communicating an appealing vision and providing a challenge along with possessing enthusiasm, optimism, and demonstrated commitment for a shared vision (Mason et al., 2014). Organizations can reach substantial business outcomes when the communication between employees and leaders form respectable relationships, resulting in caring and customer-focused employees (Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017). A culture of transparency starts from this two-way communication exchange, which can propose a sense of trust and commitment through open discussion shared between the leaders and their staff.

How employees connect and share ideas can bridge the gap between a dissatisfied and engaged work environment, thereby increasing morale and strengthening loyalty and commitment. Training can significantly improve a manager's transformational leadership behavior, thereby, leading to a positive effect on employee satisfaction, resulting in increased organizational effectiveness (Zhang, Avery, Bergsteiner, & More, 2014). Transformational leadership can influence an educational institution's faculty motivation and engage them in the learning process (Eliophotou Menon, 2014). Studying transformational leadership could further an understanding of effective leadership, especially the direction needed for worker engagement in organizational change for mission success.

Transition

The beginning of Section 1 included an introduction to the historical background and current overview of leadership strategies that promote employee engagement. In Section 1, I addressed a general and specific business problem and identified the purpose of conducting the study. I completed a qualitative research method with the conceptual framework that grounds the research, while also considering the assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and the significance of the study. The general research for this study is intended to focus on how meeting employee expectations through positive leadership strategies will promote employee engagement.

I introduced a review of the professional and academic literature to support the research topic and its underlying themes of expectancy theory, employee engagement, leadership, and motivation. In the literature review, I state different drivers of motivation and leadership strategies that influence employee engagement. People choose courses of action based on perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs (Vroom, 1964). Leadership strategies exercised within the organization could have an impact on employee motivation and engagement. According to Vroom (1964), he believed that a better effort towards motivation would lead to better engagement.

In Section 2, I restated the purpose statement for this case study, discuss the role of the researcher, elaborate on the participant access strategy, and examine ethical consideration. I included details about the methodology and data analysis to support the study. I identified the research method, data collection strategies, the reliability and validity of the instruments, and the process for this case study. In Section 3, I introduced a summary of the data analysis and the finding of this study.

Section 2: The Project

A leader's responsibility is to achieve the desired goals and outcomes of an institution while keeping employees engaged (Agarwal, 2018). If the leader is struggling on effective leadership strategies that motivate workers to be productive and content within the work environment, the results could be a lack of employee engagement, along with incomplete goals and outcomes for the organization (Boncana, 2014). In turn, with the correct leadership approach, employee engagement should become part of the application process within the higher education organization (Boncana, 2014).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore leadership strategies that higher education sector organizational leaders use to promote employee engagement. The population comprised 10 West Tennessee higher education sector organization leaders from a single higher education corporation who have implemented leadership strategies to improve employee engagement. The findings from this study could contribute to social change by providing organizations with more information about leadership strategies used to encourage employee engagement. More details on leadership strategies could lead to fewer employee turnovers in an organization, which in turn could increase community stability.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher was to administer the research study, recruit participants, collect the data, and analyze the research data to present findings. The researcher is considered the research instrument in a qualitative study (Yin, 2016). I offered a neutral and unbiased summary of events by identifying the most appropriate data collection methods that fit this qualitative single case study. Qualitative researchers must be cognizant of potential bias to conduct the study and interpreting the results (Hurt & McLaughlin, 2012). Although I work in higher education, I did not conduct interviews in my department of work to avoid any personal bias.

I mitigated bias through my understanding of the presence of a personal lens related to my views and work experience. By following the Belmont Report Protocol (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979), as the researcher, it was my responsibility to ensure the safety of all human participants and their privacy. One way to achieve this is by developing a study based on commonly accepted ethical practices and values. Not only did this help ensure the safety and well-being of participants but it also added to the reliability and validity of the research.

The interview protocol (see Appendix A) was the same for each participant. By being consistent, I prevented personal bias within the process. Bracketing is a useful technique used to separate the research topic from worldly views (Hurt & McLaughlin, 2012). I used bracketing to eliminate external influence by taking the research topic and using it in a different context by focusing on the analysis of research instead of corrective action. In the data collection process, I interviewed participants, reviewed organizational documents, and used direct observation to determine leadership strategies that promote employee engagement within their organization until data were saturated.

Data collection instruments to explore leadership strategies to promote employee engagement consisted of interviewing, organization documents, and direct observation of four senior leaders in a single higher education sector in West Tennessee. According to Bartkowiak (2012), open-ended questions help develop and prepare the data collection process in qualitative research. The participants interviewed resided in the surrounding area of West Tennessee. As Bartkowiak suggested, I used an interview protocol to help ensure consistency of the interview process (see Appendix A). To achieve methodological triangulation, I collected data from multiple sources. Secondary data collection consisted of reviewing organization documents and observing leaders in the workplace. Data collection and open-coding included interviews from participants, with a discontinuing standard of two interviews with each participant without new ideas or themes emerging. I used member checking to enhance the reliability and validity of the data collection process.

Participants

The participants of the study consisted of higher education leaders with experience in leadership strategies that promote employee engagement. The sampling of four West Tennessee higher education sector organization leaders from a single higher education corporation provided data. I obtained contact information through the human resource office within a single higher education corporation. Through the organization human resource department, I obtained a list of possible candidates who appear to meet the desired eligibility requirements. I emailed an invitation (see Appendix B) to the eligible senior leaders inviting them to participate. I polled these individuals via emails and follow-up telephone calls, identifying those employees interested in participating in the study. I was available to address all concerns via email or phone if questions arose.

Researchers have stated the importance of establishing relationships (Crocker et al., 2014; Humphrey, 2014). I needed to create a relationship with my participants, and working within the higher education sector provided me with a clearer understanding of the environment. Participants needed the minimum requirements to participate in the study. The minimum criteria for this study included (a)a minimum of 5 years experience as a senior leader within higher education, (b) being active within the senior leadership role, and (c) having developed leadership strategies that promote employee engagement.

Participants were asked to sign and return to me a consent form, which outlined the purpose of the study and confidentiality. I incorporated numbers identifying participants and filed the forms alphabetically. The interviews were face-to-face. Participant interviews lasted as long as necessary to answer each interview question, approximately 1 hour. I also asked each participant if recording the session was acceptable for research purposes only. According to Haahr, Norlyk, and Hall (2014), I must be aware of the potential relationship between the participants and myself because of working within the higher education sector. Each participant agreed to participate in the research study before the interview process.

Research Method and Design

A qualitative, single case study design was completed to explore leadership strategies that higher education sector organization leaders use to promote employee engagement. The qualitative data gathered provided a more comprehensive understanding of the approach used to encourage employee engagement. Following is an in-depth description of the research method and design of this study.

Research Method

The three methods of research available to researchers are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Yin, 2016). Researchers use qualitative research methodology to explore topics by understanding the human experience (Mertens, 2014). According to Hurt and McLaughlin (2012), qualitative researchers engage participants, observe participant practices and behaviors, and gather relevant information to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon from the participant's perspective.

Qualitative research includes in-depth interviews, focus group interviews, and participant observation (Hoare & Hoe, 2013). Although areas of similarity exist between the qualitative and quantitative methods, some distinctions remain. Merriam (2014) noted that, unlike quantitative research, qualitative research involves a small number of participants and has little methodological accuracy. Qualitative research is also more open-ended and flexible than quantitative analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). A qualitative research method was most appropriate for the research study because the purpose of the study was to explore the lived experiences of the participants.

Customarily, quantitative research involves testing hypotheses and examines relationships and differences among variables while measuring the frequency of observation (Hoare & Hoe, 2013; Riff, Lacy, & Fico, 2014; Yin, 2016). Mixed methods research is a method that requires both quantitative and qualitative methods (Merriam, 2014; Mertens, 2014; Yin, 2016). Quantitative or mixed methods research was not appropriate for the research study because no variables existed, and no hypothesis was tested. Quantitative research often includes questionnaires and surveys that only permit a limited number of predetermined responses (Merriam, 2014). A qualitative research method was appropriate for the research study to avoid limitations by exploring the lived experiences of the participants. Personal interviews are a known method of collecting data in qualitative research, which is a reliable source of information (Haahr et al., 2014). A face-to-face approach of qualitative method helps to gain an understanding of the research problem.

Research Design

A qualitative, single case study analysis was used in the study to identify strategies that promote employee engagement of the leadership staff of a higher education institution. There are four common research designs involved in qualitative research that includes (a) case study, (b) phenomenology, (c) ethnography, and (d) narrative study (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). The purpose of this case study was to explore the lived experiences as senior leaders in higher education. The case study research was appropriate to attain data saturation, which is an essential scientific model in the organization and content of qualitative research. Methodological triangulation can assist in data saturation through semistructured interviews, organization documents, and direct observation (Humphrey, 2014). A case study research design allowed me to collect data to explore leadership strategies.

The phenomenological approach consists of interpretation of meaning and individual lived experiences to increase knowledge of the phenomenon (Gee, Loewenthal, & Cayne, 2015). In the phenomenological design, the researcher provides the channel to hear the voices of participants (Humphrey, 2014). Phenomenology research pertains to life as participants experienced it rather than as people conceptualize and reflect on it (Gee et al., 2015). A phenomenological approach would not have been beneficial to the study because I was concerned with exploring leadership strategies for employee engagement.

Ethnography is a design in which researchers explore shared patterns of behavior, beliefs, and languages of a cultural group (Petty et al., 2012). An ethnography design requires lots of note taking and extensive time spent within the culture of participants (Chowdhury, 2015). An ethnography design was not appropriate for the research study because the purpose of the research was not to explore the beliefs and languages of a specific culture (see Chowdhury, 2015; Petty et al., 2012; Yin, 2016).

According to Chowdhury (2015), a narrative design is well suited to analyze a story or the historical accounts of individuals. Narrative research could include interviews, letters, documentation, photos, and any other elements to assist in telling the participant’s story (Petty et al., 2012). A narrative design enables the researcher to focus detailed stories of the life events of the participant (Chowdhury, 2015). Storytelling was not the focus of this study; therefore, a narrative design was not appropriate.

The purpose of a case study design is to allow the researcher to study a case to expand their understanding of the situation (Petty et al., 2012). The basis of a case study is rich data gathered to answer questions of why and how something occurs in a natural setting (Chowdhury, 2015). Personal interviews, observations, and workplace documents, such as meeting notes and measurement charts provide data triangulation (Yin, 2016). A single case study is the optimal research design for exploring human behavior in a real-world context (Yin, 2016). The case study research design permitted the collection of data to support this study.

Population and Sampling

The target population for this study will come from a West Tennessee higher education sector of organization leaders from a single higher education corporation. The West Tennessee area is diverse, and potential participants were from different ethnic backgrounds. I explored leadership strategies of higher education leaders for the research study. As previously stated, I obtained contact information through the human resource office within a single higher education corporation. Participants interviews were in a mutually agreed upon neutral setting. The location of the interviews must provide a peaceful environment with the ability to talk freely with no interruptions. As noted by Humphrey (2014), the interview location can influence the quality of the data, thus impacting the reliability and validity of the study.

A purposeful sampling method is appropriate for accurate interpretation of findings in a research study (Humphrey, 2014). According to Wolff-Michael (2015), purposeful sampling permits the researcher to achieve broad information from a select few. The purposeful sampling strategy consisted of screening and selecting the participants that are senior leaders involved in strategies that promote employee engagement within higher education. Through the cooperation of the organization human resource department, I obtained a list of possible candidates who appear to meet the desired eligibility requirements. I polled these individuals via emails and follow-up telephone calls, identifying those employees interested in participating in the study. I was available to address all concerns via email or phone when questions arose.

I used a sample size of participants for this study. A small number is suitable for a qualitative case study (Carlson, 2010; Totawar & Prasad, 2016). The sample size for this study were four. Wolff-Michael (2015) mentioned that sample size affects the saturation of the research and should never be too small or too large. Data saturation usually means no new surprises or patterns are emerging as new data are analyzed (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). To achieve data saturation, I used open-ended questions to conduct interviews with the participants. The open-ended interview questions will allow the researcher to gather data from multiple participants regarding the same topic until data saturation is achieved. Additional interviews are necessary if by the 4^{th} participant data saturation has not been reached. There were four participants from a higher education facility in the West Tennessee area. These participants will be leaders from the organization. The minimum criteria to participate in this study included (a) minimum of 5 years' experience as a senior leader within higher education, (b) active within the senior leadership role, and (c) developed leadership strategies that promote employee engagement. Because I have a professional work relationship within the higher education sector, I avoided bias. To avoid bias, I selected participants with whom I have no working relationship and will require interviewing in a mutually agreed upon neutral setting.

Ethical Research

Ethical concerns may surface, which is why I should always be responsive and flexible throughout the research process. According to Yin (2016), ethicality is used to achieve trustworthiness in research. Ethical guidelines protect the participant and strengthen research results. As required, I completed the National Institute of Health (NIH) training course “Protecting Human Research Participants”. This step is necessary to ensure I fully understand the ethical standards and legal requirements required to protect the right of human participants.

Researchers must commit to contractual obligations that ensure the use of ethical and moral standards during research (Farmer & Lundy, 2017). I emailed each potential participant an invitation that included a consent form and with the option to withdraw from the study. Once returned to me, the documents will be stored in a locked safe in my home for five years. Participant information will be kept confidential. If any participant chooses to withdraw, without penalty, I selected another potential participant from the list obtained from the higher education facility human resource department. No interviews completed without consent.

Before I began collecting data on this study, I obtained approval from Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB). The Walden IRB approval number is 04-11-19-0266648 and expires on April 10, 2020. I stored all research data in a locked file for five years, to protect the confidentiality of corporations, corporate administrators, and participants. At the end of this period, all data documents will be shredded, and electronic data will be erased.

Data Collection Instruments

By conducting semistructured face-to-face interviews, organization documents, and direct observations, I served as the primary data collection tool. Data collection is organized information collected from study participants (Hurst et al., 2015). Identifying the instrument, type of interview strategy, and the process necessary to resolve explanations follow. The data collection instruments used in this case study included semistructured interviews and direct observation. Totawar and Prasad (2016) suggested that interviews are the most substantial qualitative data collection method. Rubin and Rubin (2012) mentioned that interviewing is a dynamic and iterative process that is all about communication. In qualitative studies, researchers use open-ended interview questions to learn about the experience of the participant relevant to the phenomena (Humphrey, 2014). Implementing open-ended interview questions will allow participants to respond to all items openly. Researchers were suggested to use semistructured interviews, which include the use of both, prepared and unstructured questions, to gain a more detailed account of the views of the participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

The design of each interview questions served to explore the lived experiences of the participant for addressing the principal research question. I explored leaders' strategies used to promote employee engagement. The validity of the qualitative data is reliant on the ability of the interviewer to create data dedicated to the topic of interest within the time allocated for discussion (Hurst et al., 2015). The credibility of the research is dependent on the operation of procedures and the self-awareness of the researcher (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). Notebooks, writing tools, and a digital voice recorder served as data collection instruments for the study, along with Yin’s five-step analysis method (Yin, 2016). I observed gestures and facial expressions.

Researchers have been known to use NVivo 10 for analyzing audio recordings and interviews. I used the NVivo 12 instrument for analyzing the data. The researcher must consider the appropriateness of the data collection tools to ensure validity and reliability of the study (Humphrey, 2014). The instruments used ensured data reliability for the study. To ensure the validity of this study, I followed the procedures for providing the synthesis of the information. I also included member checking by a follow-up interview with participants to allow the participants to examine my interpretation of the interview content. I shared my interpretation of the interview with participants, so each participant can critically review and suggest changes accordingly.

Data Collection Technique

I collected the data by conducting face-to-face semistructured interviews, organization documents, and direct observation. Interviews are primary and set once the participant responds to the invitation (see Appendix B). Interviews are an appropriate method for collecting data and establishing rapport in a case study format (Yin, 2016). Secondary data consisted of observing the participants’ in their natural work environment. Qualitative data collection consists of establishing boundaries for the study and collecting information about the problem from participants through interviews, gathered text, visual, audio, or video formats.

There are pros and cons associated with semistructured interviews in data collection. The open-ended questions allow the participants to share more information openly (Humphrey, 2014). The use of in-depth interview questions gives the participants a chance to provide continuous information rather than brief answers (Yin, 2016). There can be concerns of semistructured interviews such as obtaining verbatim responses and whether the interviewee will be comfortable or not (Harvey, 2015). I interviewed participants in a mutually healthy environment and gather information by using an audio recording format for accuracy.

There are also pros and cons associated with gathering organizational documents for review. Corporate records are a supporting source of information to assist in validating research data. The concerns with organizational documents can help the ease and accuracy of obtaining verbatim transcripts (Harvey, 2015). I made sure any captured documents are kept confidential and used for doctoral research purposes only.

Recordings were performed using an Olympus WS-852 Digital Voice Recorder. In case of any technical issues, I used my Samsung S8 cellular phone as a recording back-up. Member checking allows the participants to review the data and feedback. Member checking assisted in validating the participant feedback, as well as provide accuracy and credibility (Harvey, 2015). I transcribed the tape-recorded audio interviews. I used the following steps for the data collection process:

1. I provided the participant with an outline of the interview process and questions.
2. Through prior permission from participants, I recorded the interview using a digital voice recorder.
3. Each participant were asked the central research interview question along with seven sub-interview questions.

4. I transcribed the digital voice recording of each interview to text through voice recognition software, Rev, on a password-protected computer.
5. I used member checking with participants by completing a follow-up interview for approval and feedback.
6. I made any corrections as needed per participant's feedback.
7. I saved the original voice recordings onto a zip drive and made a hard copy of the finalized transcriptions for further use in the data analysis process.
8. I stored all voice recording and transcription hardcopies in a locked storage cabinet for confidentiality and safeguarding. I will save the items for five years, and then will shred the hardcopy documents and erase all electronic files.
9. I coded transcripts based on specific experiences, perceptions, and feedback from member checking.
10. I identified the common patterns and themes from the encrypted data.

Interviewing can be susceptible to bias. The use of general open-ended questions assisted in collecting information about leadership strategies in a non-biased manner. I provided the opportunity for the participants to ask questions or clarify any issues. A friend by the name of Dr. Lisa Tyler assisted in an informal mock trial-run of the interview process to practice my data collection interview protocol.

Data Organization Technique

The preparation for data organization begins before conducting interviews by ensuring that the instruments and materials perform as expected (Potter, Mills, Cawthorn, Donovan, & Blazeby, 2014). I tracked and organized the data of this study with the assistance of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), NVivo 12 used for analyzing data. Data organization aids the researcher in the data analysis process (Brooks & Normore, 2015; Haahr et al., 2014; Yin, 2016). Yin (2016) explained how multiple methods of recorded data, such as field notes, art, artifacts, photographs, and videotapes, can provide an ample array of visual representation in qualitative research.

The information will remain on a password-protected laptop while transcribing the interviews. The written transcripts and audio-recorded interviews will be in a secure filing box in my possession. Both written and audio transcripts will remain stored for five years after the study is complete and I will destroy them immediately afterward by using a cross-cut shredder and electronic data will be erased. Each participant was provided a code to protect his or her identity throughout the research. The codes for the participants consisted of a capital P for a participant and a number that indicated the order of the interview (i.e., P1, P2).

Data Analysis

Triangulation encourages the researcher to analyze data collected from multiple sources focusing on confirming themes or recognizing patterns within the study (de Oliveira & Pereira, 2014). Methodological triangulation process assists in data saturation and allows researchers to acknowledge that no new data emerges from the analysis of the data (Yin, 2016). I selected a sample size of four senior leaders to gather relevant data and achieve data saturation. A methodological triangulation was used to analyze data by using at least two data collection procedures such as interviews and organization documentation. A digital recorder was used to record the interviews. I listened to the interviews and then manually transcribe the conversations. The interview questions enable participants to generate responses related to the primary themes of (a) motivation, (b) employee engagement, and (c) leadership influence. The use of multiple sources of data and appropriate analysis of the data increases the accuracy of the results (Yin, 2016). I used Yin (2016) five steps data analysis technique to analyze the data. The five steps included (a) compiling the data, (b) disassembling the data, (c) reassembling the data, (d) interpreting the data, (e) and concluding the data.

Data analysis and interpretation are two essential components of the research process (Basurto & Speer, 2012). Data analysis will help to answer the research questions (Basurto & Speer, 2012). NVivo 12 software was appropriate to highlight the emerging themes in the study of both the interview text and the audio recordings (Basurto & Speer, 2012; Houghton et al., 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). NVivo 12 software also will help to organize the raw data, to reveal themes by aiding in decoding and interpreting the data, and to code the data to identify categories (Basurto & Speer, 2012; Houghton et al., 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The groups will undergo further categorization after gaining approval to collect data.

I used NVivo 12 software specifically designed for analysis of qualitative data. NVivo12 qualitative data analysis software gathers words and phrases to develop themes, subthemes, categories, and tags using word recognition and auto-coding functions (Hurst et al., 2015). Categorization of findings by theme coding ensures thorough data analysis (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Sotiriadou, Brouwers, and Le (2014) noted that data coding is essential to identifying themes. Data coding can help sort data to compare the experiences of individuals and will help categorize information in a uniform manner (Humphrey, 2014). To maintain participant confidentiality, the individual names of the participants were standard initials.

Data analysis focuses on answering the central question of this study. Interview questions focus on different themes to understand the personal experience of senior leaders. The conceptual framework for this study is Vroom's expectancy theory, which includes that employees' work hard when leaders meet basic employee expectations in the workplace (Lazaroiu, 2015). Employees are satisfied when recognized on their performance. Employee motivation increases when leaders meet personal expectations (Lazaroiu, 2015). Employee motivation can show an increase based on performance awards.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are essential elements researchers must consider when evaluating the quality of research. To determine the reliability of a study, researchers must demonstrate the rigorousness of the study (Goldberg & Allen, 2015). Qualitative researchers must also prove their research is trustworthy by including these four elements: credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability (Yin, 2016). The researcher must understand the information from each component and how it affects a study.

Reliability

The reliability of a study refers to the reproducibility of the findings (Dikko, 2016). In qualitative research, dependability is equivalent to the reliability. The purpose of establishing reliability is to minimize the risk of errors in a study (Yin, 2016). Maintaining consistency throughout the study is critical, from the initial stage to the conclusion (Bengtsson, 2016). To keep this consistency; the interview questions are an essential contribution as these are significant to assure reliability.

The dependability of a qualitative study ensures study replication. The goal of qualitative research is to investigate the complexity of a phenomenon deeply in a dynamic and changing world (Kihn & Ihantola, 2015). To achieve dependability, the researcher should provide a detailed explanation of the steps applied during the research study, which will allow other researchers to duplicate the study (Dikko, 2016). To increase the reliability of the study, I used member checking. Member checking increases the dependability of research by proactively mitigating potential problems (Oleinik, Popova, Kirdina, & Shatalova, 2014). I completed member checking by completing a follow-up interview process with participants.

Validity

In qualitative studies, reliability and validity are mostly the same concepts (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Qualitative consistency is central to influence others to trust and have assurance in the research (Kihn & Ihantola, 2015). Trust and confidence are especially difficult to accomplish in qualitative studies because people have their unique theoretical lens through which they understand phenomena (Neuman, 2014).

The validity of the research occurs when the researcher accurately represents the event of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The primary factors in determining the validity of a review include the efficiency of the coding process, the use of member checking, peer-review briefing, triangulation, and external audits (Kihn & Ihantola, 2015). Member checking was used to obtain the views of the participants regarding the data collected from a follow-up interview (Kihn & Ihantola, 2015).

O'Reilly and Parker (2013) suggested the process by which researchers use to establish data saturation justifies the sample size. Kihn and Ihantola (2015) confirmed that data saturation occurs when no new information emerges in the process of collecting data. Data saturation is a methodological concept in the organization and content of qualitative research (Tavakol & Sandars, 2014). To ensure the reliability and validity of my study findings, I conducted a thorough analysis of the data and examine the relevance of the data. I discussed my interpretation of records from the initial interviews with 4 participants. The objective of the study, which is to explore leadership strategies that promote employee engagement, supports the sample size.

Credibility. Qualitative researchers can make their research trustworthy by demonstrating credibility (Singh, 2015). Goldberg and Allen (2015) suggested that member checking is the process by which researchers can achieve credibility by returning to the participants before data analysis to seek their reactions to interview summaries. Triangulation enhances the credibility of the research and allows the researcher to apply various methods of data collection to provide readers with an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study and to confirm the study findings (Singh, 2015; Yin, 2016).

To test for credibility, the study participants will need to sample coded passages of their transcribed data and offer their opinion regarding the accuracy of the data interpretation. Both study participants can recognize the descriptions as their own. The researcher should focus on achieving the rigor and credibility of the research to validate the trustworthiness of the study (Elo et al., 2014). I achieved research rigor by choosing a purposeful sample of four senior leaders. I interviewed and observed the participants with their participants. As a result, I gained accuracy from the participants to report in the study.

Confirmability. Confirmability surfaces when the study reflects the views of the participants' and not of the researcher (Singh, 2015). Showing relevancy in the research is essential. The reader must discover that data provided in the study is relevant and the findings transferable, the study will then show confirmability (Yin, 2016). Researchers highlight available data to be sure of accuracy and interpretation of human experience so that people with related experiences can merely identify with the result.

Transferability. Researchers can establish transferability in qualitative research by providing a contextualized account of the phenomenon and by richly describing the factors that influenced the decision to study a population or setting (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013; Singh, 2015). To ensure transferability, I collected data that provided a rich description of the data findings. Unlike external generalizability, transferability does not involve claims on the part of the researcher. Instead, by claiming transferability, a researcher is inviting readers to gain insights from the findings and to make the connections that they choose based on their own experiences (Imran & Yusoff, 2015).

Qualitative researchers can establish transferability on a case-to-case basis by using rich descriptions and sampling strategies.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I described how I would implement the data collection technique, the role of the researcher and the purpose of the study to explore my leader's insight regarding leadership strategies that promote employee engagement. Information was provided on data organization and analysis process as well as on the study reliability and validity. I administered semistructured interviews with four senior leaders in a higher education sector in West Tennessee. The purpose of the interviews is to collect data on leadership strategies that promote employee engagement. To achieve data triangulation, in addition to interviews, I observed participants demeanor around their employees. In Section 3, I provided an overview of the study; discuss findings, present information on a professional standpoint, and the implications for social change. I also detailed recommendations for action and further research, reflections, and the summary and conclusions.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the leadership strategies that senior leaders use to promote employee engagement. The research question used to guide this research study is as follows: What leadership strategies do higher education sector organizational leaders use to promote employee engagement? To answer the research question, data were obtained from six open-ended interview questions, direct observation, and public organizational documents.

Triangulation is obtained by using a combination of findings from two or more approaches to provide a more comprehensive picture of the results than either approach could do alone (Kihn & Ihantola, 2015). To support triangulation, data were collected from senior leaders who successfully used strategies that promote employee engagement from the interview process. Data were also obtained from direct observation of senior leaders while they worked and interacted with employees within a normal work setting. Public organizational documents including organization catalog, mission statement, and committee notes were also collected.

Presentation of the Findings

In this research study, I conducted face-to-face interviews with four higher education senior leaders to address the study's purpose and research question. I scheduled and conducted each participant's interview in a mutually agreed private office setting, and interviews did not last more than 60 minutes. I used a purposeful sampling method and semistructured, open-ended interview questions. The objective of each open-ended question was to collect information from the participants about their experience. Before starting the interview process, participants signed a consent form, and they received a copy for their records. Participants were informed of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time, and participation was voluntary.

To support the validity of this study, I used the methodological triangulation process. I collected data from participants' interviews, direct observation of the participants interacting within their natural work environment, and organizational public document analysis. After transcribing all interviews, member checking was completed with each participant as a follow-up interview process. In the member checking process, each participant received a copy of the interpretations of the interview transcriptions. I coded participants' names and a single corporation to maintain confidentiality. I labeled all participants' transcriptions using a system where P1 meant Participant 1, P2 meant Participant 2, P3 meant Participant 3, and P4 meant Participant 4.

I used Yin's (2016) five steps data analysis technique to analyze the data. The five steps included (a) compiling the data, (b) disassembling the data, (c) reassembling the data, (d) interpreting the data, (e) and concluding the data. It could potentially take several rounds of interviews to reach data saturation if the participant adds new data during the member checking process. However, I recognized no new data were emerging after member checking my third participant. At that point, saturation was met and further surfaced after analyzing the data. In a qualitative study, data saturation derives when there is no new information in the interview process (Fusch & Ness, 2015). After achieving data saturation from interviews, direct observation, and organizational documents, I manually analyzed the data and entered them into the NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software program. The NVivo software was used to assist in determining word frequency and identify reoccurring themes from the interview and direct observation process. I identified three themes from analyzing the data: (a) engaging through communication, (b) developing engagement strategies, and (c) engaging through recognition and rewards. These themes are in alignment with the conceptual framework and the research question.

In 1964, Vroom developed the Vroom's expectancy theory to measure motivation in a combination of the apparent attraction of future outcomes and the chance one's actions will lead to those outcomes. Expectancy theory relates to the degree of employee motivations employees exercise in the workforce (Vroom, 1964). Vroom identified three components to determine motivational force: (a) expectancy, (b) instrumentality, and (c) valence. *Expectancy* refers to an individual's self-efficacy, *instrumentality* pertains to reward or outcome that an employee receives for performing well; and *valence* is affective orientations toward a particular outcome or value of an outcome (Vroom, 1964). I used the Vroom's expectancy theory as the conceptual framework for exploring strategies that senior leaders in higher education used to engage the employee.

The central research question for this study was as follow: What leadership strategies do higher education sector organizational leaders use to promote employee engagement? The face-to-face interviews were conducted to gain an understanding of the strategies the participants used to promote employee engagement. The open-ended questions asked to participants are as follows:

- Question 1: What leadership strategies do you use to promote employee engagement? The objective of this question was to provide each participant the opportunity to discuss his or her positive strategies used to support engaging their employees.
- Question 2: What is your experience as a leader in higher education using a strategy for engaging employees? The objective of this question was for the participant to share his or her background and expertise as a leader engaging employees within higher education. Participants shared their years of experience and provided an example of a positive strategy that engages employees.
- Question 3: What challenges have you experienced using leadership strategies to promote employee engagement? The objective of this question was for the participant to express any encounters faced that hindered them in dealing with strategies to promote employee engagement.
- Question 4: What leadership procedures have you implemented to reward employees for expected performance behaviors? The objective of this question was to gain information on different ways the participant rewarded their employees for good work.
- Question 5: Which of the approaches was the most effective? The objective of this question was to determine if a particular leadership strategy was more effective in engaging employees.
- Question 6: What other information would you like to discuss regarding your leadership strategies that promote employee engagement? The objective of this

question was to allow participants to add any additional data they believed was relevant to the study. No new themes emerged from the data collected from this question.

The interviews were coded based on the frequency of topics referenced. Table 1 provides the coded themes as follows:

Table 1

Themes Developed From the Coding of the Interviews

Coded themes	Frequency of references	%
Engaging through Communication	36	47%
Developing engagement strategies	21	28%
Engaging through recognition and rewards	19	25%

Theme 1: Engaging Through Communication

The first theme derived from the research finding was employee engagement. The research from this theme emerged from an in-depth analysis of the participants' interview responses and direct observation. The act of engagement or employee involvement was predominantly mentioned by the participants. According to Nasomboon (2014), employee engagement involves motivation and developing a relationship with employees to produce a healthy work environment.

P1 stated that "engaging with your employees and keeping them involved in processes is important." P1 also shared that having employees on a committee or engaging as a team will assist in having efficiency in the workplace. Improving employee engagement within higher education is dependent upon effective leadership practices (Taneja et al., 2015). P2 said, “Bringing structure to that leadership style helps promote engagement with those who report to you.”

P3 and P4 had the highest frequency of mentioning employee engagement within the interview process. P3 claimed, “I try to engage with my employees on matters that pertain to them; I try to engage them as much as possible.” In addition, P4 recalled “To promote employee engagement, one is to actually engage employees… in other words; you discuss things with the employees.” P4 also asserted, “So employee engagement has almost become like a catchphrase, but it's really just as simple as you actually engage the employees.” P3 stressed the benefits of employee engagement by stating, “I would like to see within the university more leaders adopt strategies to engage employees.”

During the direct observation, P2 and P3 demonstrated acts of engagement with subordinates. P2 engaged with his administrative assistant on an active strategy within one of the departments, the participant supervises. P3 was involved with three acts of engagement. First, when I arrived, the participant was engaging with what was obvious another employee of the organization on a policy. P3 asked questions, and the employee provided feedback along with suggestions. Second, P3 had an employee come to the participant’s office to discuss a matter. The employee stated her issue, and the advisor consulted the employee on how to resolve it. The final act of engagement was with the participant’s administrative assistant. Both participants showed professionalism and appeared to satisfy each subordinate they came in contact with during direct observation.

Communication is a key component driver of employee engagement (Meng, 2014). P2 likes to provide a direct communication approach when engaging with employees on a positive or negative situation: “I like, especially those that report directly to me, if there is an issue or if there is something positive, I like to bring them in during that point of occurrence.” P2 further discussed the importance of communication by stating, “I do like staying in contact with my employees on a much more frequent basis than just a recap annual evaluation on their performance; waiting to communicate information is ineffective.”

P3 stated, “Communication is very important in engaging with your employees and different leaders within higher education. As a leader, I like communicating and staying in contact with my employees frequently.” P4 stated, “I like to talk to my employees.” Providing your employees with feedback is a great form of communication. P3 stated, “Generally, I try to be consistent and provide positive feedback as often as I can.” Communication is an effective strategy to improve employee morale by engaging in open communication (Anand, 2017). Currently, P3 feels that communicating and providing amble feedback to your employees is a very effective approach in leadership strategies. P3 shared an organizational document of updates that are communicated on a weekly basis. P4 shared a positive communication experience dealing with feedback from employees on a strategy the participant developed. P4 stated, “Good feedback was gained from faculty members on a strategy developed within academics.”

Improved levels of communication within the workplace can lead to transparency (Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017). Transparency is the action of providing direct communication without any secrets, which in turn increases trust and credibility (Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017). Employee engagement is known to increase as transparency increase within the workplace (Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017). P3 provided a high interest in transparency by making 54% percent of the comments on this topic. P3 quoted, “Effective communication assists in making things more transparent.” I try to be as inclusive as possible in sharing information with my employees.” P3 further stated, “I try to engage them in conversations about how we move forward with the initiatives, and provide feedback as we go along, so they are not surprised by anything that comes out at a later point in time.” P1 stated, “The leadership strategies that I like to use are those that involve the employee actually creating what they feel is the right way to go.”

The increase in transparency improves workplace relationships between employees and leaders. P3 quoted, “I also give them the advantage of sharing their ideas when it comes to changes within their job. If there is someone new on board, I will involve them on a training basis.” P1 stated, “It is ineffective to change a process and not include the employees involved with that task; this is one good way to lose some of your best employees because you’ve given them no input in their job.” P4 stated, “we often seem to forget that the employees are actually the ones closer to the work, closer to the customer, closer to whatever is going on in the work environment.”

Participants 2 and 4 expressed transparency more directly by being inclusive of their leadership style. The following statements support this claim. P2 stated, “In my leadership style, I like to keep employees in the loop but allow people ample opportunity to do their job without their job being dictated to them.” P4 said, “I like to talk and get information from them and get their thoughts." P2 further quoted, "I don't particularly like mixing words; direct answers, straight to the facts, that's the way I try to be." P4 added, "You discuss things with the employees, and layout the net result in the goal that you want to achieve by having a collaborative session to ask questions." P4 further added, "The best strategy with faculty was about backing off and allowing them to do what they do best. The less micromanagement, the better, which showed autonomy and transparency are the words I'm looking for."

Correlation to the conceptual framework. The findings from the research that involved employee engagement along with subthemes communication and transparency were consistent with the conceptual framework Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory. Employee engagement provides the motivation needed to meet organizational goals. Employees behaviors can change based on their levels of motivation (Vroom, 1964). The expectancy theory has an association with employee satisfaction and engagement. According to Vroom (1964), the subthemes involved with employee engagement relates to the *instrumentality* of performance, which may result in a positive outcome, is expected by employees as well as leadership.

Theme 2: Developing Engagement Strategies

The changing environment of higher education, a constant challenge exists for higher education facilities to be fruitful and profitable (Agarwal, 2018). P3 stated, "As a leader, we face change regularly. At times these changes will affect your staff and job duties." The need for competent leaders is rampant within the industry, and the participants shared their concerns. In the competitive world of higher education, leaders are consistently facing a variety of challenges (Agarwal, 2018). The most dominant concerns that surfaced from the research were time and work performance.

Both P1 and P 2 stated how time was a major factor within using leadership strategies in higher education. The following statements support this claim. P1 specified, "Once you get approval to do a strategy you have a certain time frame to get it done. That's the challenge; it is time." P2 stated, "I don't have time for small talk and really nobody else should either. However, some want to beat around the bush to get to an answer. If you just went straight to the answer; you would save a lot of time and a lot of effort."

Both P3 and P4 stated how work performance was a major factor within using leadership strategies in higher education. P3 and P4 comments consumed 86% of the statements dealing with challenges leaders face in developing strategies. P4stated, "Work performance on average versus above-average employees is always a challenge." According to Sushil (2014), disengaged employees, can affect meeting organizational goals, which could be vital to the organization. P3 specified, "I have dealt with employees with poor work performance. These situations can be tough on an organization and handled mild or significant, depending on the situation." P4 included. "As a senior leader, I have experienced challenges from some poor leadership above me; you know a micro-management style. This can be toxic and does not help in engaging employees."

P3 stated, "Training issues can be corrected and reversed to reflect a more positive outcome." P4 included, "Sometimes, moving the people that are less successful into a better position can be a challenge." Walthall & Dent (2016) noted that leaders should train and assist in developing skills to increase performance. P4 quoted, "At times, some employees require more attention and effort on your part as a leader to assist in building performance."

P2 and P4 expressed how challenges can arise in organizations that do not have policy and procedures in place. P2 stated that "I like policies and without policies or structure an organization can be affected." The organization's employee handbook and a document provided by P2 discussing employee, financial policies, and educational policies within the realm of higher education were reviewed to support the data on the importance of policies. The following statements provided further support to this claim. P2 stated, "It seems in some higher education, at times, there is not as much structure and bringing structure to that leadership style helps promote engagement." Organizations that implement policy and procedure operate and perform efficiently (Agarwal, 2018). P4 included, "Until you have processes and understand how those processes fit into the bigger picture; you just can't get a grip on what is trying to be accomplished."

Correlation to the conceptual framework. The findings involving challenges that leaders face in developing strategies were related to the conceptual framework Vroom (1964) expectancy theory through the components valence and expectancy. Managers must discover what employees need and value (Vroom, 1964). Employees have different expectations and levels of confidence about what they are capable of doing (Vroom, 1964). Management must discover what resources, training, or supervision employees need (Vroom, 1964). Part of the component of expectancy is related to the level of difficulty a manager experiences.

Theme 3: Engaging Through Recognition and Rewards

Employee recognition and rewards were the next theme that resulted from analyzing the interview data. According to Sushil (2014), employees want rewards for their hard works and achievements. P1 stated, “The awarding of certificates, trophies/plaques, or monetary gifts are very effective approaches to deserving employees.” Often, increased pay results in employees being actively engaged within the organization (HemaMalini & Washington, 2014). P1and P2 expressed how monetary approaches and increased compensation are forms of promoting employee engagement. The following statements support this claim. P1 stated, “A monetary approach, depending on financial constraints, has been used for employees that have gone over and above. It is not enough to break the bank, but it is enough to make the employee feel appreciated.” Anand (2017) expressed that by rewarding employees for reaching performance goals, leaders create an operating environment of workers showing more initiative. P2 stated, “I wholeheartedly favor merit raises than across the board raises because you always have some that benefit and don't deserve it.”P3 specified, “Generally, what I have found to be one of the most effective motivators is adjustments in compensation”.

Organizations that recognize their employee experience a positive impact on the culture of the workplace (HemaMalini & Washington, 2014). P2 stated, “Being in a competitive market, financial growth is not always there to reward people with pay raises.” Individuals will work for money but go the extra mile for recognition and praise

(Lazaroiu, 2015). P2 specified, “At times, when the budget will not allow leaders to give pay raises, you come up with different things that financially you can do, such as employee gatherings and being flexible with time.” P1 stated, “What I have found in this higher education industry is that people want to be appreciated more than anything else; we try to recognize employees at least twice a year.” P4 included, “Employee recognition awards are distributed for being the most effective person in a particular department”of service ceremony, and picnics; but I think having a positive environment and acknowledging employees for their good works is more of a motivator.”

Correlation to the conceptual framework. The findings surfaced from employee recognition and rewards were related to the discoveries of Vroom (1964) expectancy theory. According to Vroom (1964), favorable performance will result in a desirable reward or recognition of an individual. Managers must ensure that rewards are fulfilled and employees are aware of that (Vroom, 1964). Recognition and rewards relate to instrumentality and valence of Vroom’s expectancy theory because employees have sentimental placements towards the results of their abilities and expect recognition and rewards for their labors.

Applications to Professional Practice

The research applied to business practices indicated how effective leadership strategies contribute to increasing employee engagement and profits. Business leaders can create their leadership strategy more effectively by considering what their employees need for peak performance (Vroom, 1964). Organizations are less effective when employees are not motivated to do their jobs because motivation directly affects job performance (Vroom, 1964). To obtain the best practices, leaders should identify and prioritize employee needs as well as organizational needs.

The research findings support that employee engagement is a constant process that directly affects employee performance. In higher education, senior leaders play a significant role in promoting employee engagement to improve employee performance to increase the success of the organization. The findings resulted in the following three themes: (a) employee engagement with subthemes: communication and transparency, (b) challenges leaders face in developing strategies, and (c) employee rewards and recognition. Higher education leaders who fail to engage their employees and recognize factors that promote engagement face challenges. The challenges leaders may face are time constraints, poor work performance, ineffective leadership, and lack of structure.

Lack of employee engagement, communication, transparency, rewards, and recognition will influence turnover and affect profits in an organization (Anand, 2017). Organizations must recognize that effective e employees are their main asset and cannot afford to lose key performers (Sushil, 2014). Organizations should offer employees the opportunity to advance within their environment, thus reducing turnover and promoting company growth.

Higher education leaders can implement strategies to achieve desirable employee outcome. Therefore, it is recommended that senior leaders develop leadership strategies that will result in employee and organizational growth. Employee evaluations, motivational factors, mission statements, and rewards and recognition programs are strategies implemented within the higher education facility and included in this research study.

Higher education leaders can apply these strategies to implement successful programs and open the door to effective communication, thus gaining a better workplace relationship between leaders and employees. According to research, environmental pressures force business leaders to look at strong leadership structure to maintain their competitive edge (Anand, 2017). Leadership that involves structure is initiated to develop strategies that can fill in the ineffective gaps. As senior leaders understand these strategies, the research results may aid leaders in creating strategies, which in turn, will promote employee engagement, increase profits, and retain key professionals within their organizations. The research results align with the business problem and the research question, by providing higher education leaders leadership strategies to yield better business practices.

Implications for Social Change

The focus of this study was to explore leadership strategies that promote employee engagement. This single qualitative case study has several implications for social change. Leadership strategies that actively engage employees contribute to organizational success and better job performance. In an evolving higher education industry, leaders constantly seek strategies to engage their employees (Boncana, 2014). Although there is no single leadership strategy to improve employee engagement, this shows how leaders from one single higher education facility used leadership strategies to improve employee engagement to increase competitive edge and profitability.

Senior leaders who aggressively concentrate on improving employee engagement outperform their competitors in different levels of productivity and financial measures (Sambrook et al., 2014). Although there are several leadership strategies that influence employee engagement, this study specifies concepts that senior leaders used to (a) develop better leadership strategies, (b) increase employee engagement, (c) improve communication and transparency, (d) overcome challenges, (e)implementing rewards and recognition programs, and (f) create a positive work environment. Employee engagement could have long-term effects on organizational sustainability (Anand, 2017). Researchers could utilize the findings of the study to develop a greater understanding of leadership strategies that promote employee engagement, thus, increasing performance in the higher education industry and better serving education to the community.

Recommendations for Action

The findings gained from the participants' responses during the interviews might lead to new perceptions higher education leaders can use to promote employee engagement. Employee engagement does not just happen without the actions of senior leaders to influence the occurrences. The outcome of the research shows that higher education senior leaders apply engagement in numerous ways, which improve employees' performance and organizations' stability.

I recommend using effective leadership strategies to promote employee engagement by (a) engaging in a healthy relationship between leaders and employees, (b) effective communication process, (c) being transparent, (d) understanding behaviors to overcome challenges, (e) rewarding and recognizing employees to increase performance.

These concepts are a cost-effective approach to improving employee motivation s, which will positively affect job performance and organizational effectiveness (Vroom, 1964). Senior leaders should also consider working with human resource personnel to ensure the leadership strategies align with the objectives of the higher education system.

Senior leaders being resistant to implementing effective leadership strategies might have an adverse effect on engagement, productivity, and profitability. By being non-resistant to the implementation of effective leadership strategies, a positive effect may occur in the higher education industry. Senior leaders could share the research results in leadership conferences, training, and related business forums.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings of this study permit further exploration of leadership strategies that promote employee engagement. As mentioned earlier, higher education is a changing environment (Agarwal, 2018). Researchers should continue to research the changing aspects of higher education that may focus on different leadership strategies that promote employee engagement. Researches could target more participants and involve demographic criteria.

The finding of this study focused on senior leaders, while future qualitative researchers could explore effective strategies based on the subordinates’ perspective. The researcher could gain a whole new perception of effective strategies by interviewing subordinates instead of leaders. I also suggest researchers exploring a different geographic location, which may bring a more thorough understanding of strategies to assist leaders. Last, a researcher could use a quantitative method to examine the relationship between employee engagement and leaders, subordinates, non-profit organizations, or other business variables. A researcher that focuses on additional research will provide new insight on strategies that promote employee engagement.

Reflections

As I reflect on my educational journey as a doctoral student, I faced several challenges. Work-life balance has been a tremendous challenge for me by having a full-time job and a family. I am thankful to God for allowing me to get through my obstacles and have great support. Time management and learning the Walden research process was also a difficult part of this research process. It took lots of late nights, but I learned to adjust my time to gain a work-life balance and keep the rubric very close by my side. I eventually learned the concept of anthropomorphism, which is the interpretation of human traits to non-human traits. I had to ask several questions on the process of data collection and making sure my study is in alignment.

According to Yin (2016), the qualitative designs to consider are a case study, phenomenology, ethnography, and narrative design. I chose the method of single qualitative case study design to explore leadership strategies that promote employee engagement at one higher education facility. I chose a single case study because I wanted to focus on one organization with substantial years of establishment that included leaders with numerous years of experience. The leaders were experts in their field and appeared very comfortable sharing information. I learned quickly, not to comment on a participant's response during an interview. The reason why is because you want to gain your participant's view and not sway their answer on the topic.

As the researcher of this study, I was always aware of personal biases during the entire process. The findings of this study draw near to me by being an employee within higher education. I was shocked by the consistency of the data gained from my participants. The finding from this study has enlightened me to strategies that I may in a possible future senior leadership position within higher education.

Summary and Study Conclusions

The purpose of this single qualitative case study was to explore possible key themes of leadership strategies that can promote employee engagement. From the research findings, the key themes of leadership strategies that promote employee engagement are (a) employee engagement with subthemes: communication and transparency, (b) challenges leaders face in developing strategies, and (c) employee rewards and recognition. The conceptual framework of this study was Vroom's expectancy theory of motivation (Vroom, 1964).

Past researchers discovered that strategies used to improve employee engagement are critical to the success of an organization (Nasomboon, 2014; Suhariadi, 2016). Workplace leaders who do not encourage employee engagement face challenges on being competitive and sustainable (Dagher et al., 2015). Employees that are engaged are happier and more productive than unengaged employees (Nasomboon, 2014). The above findings shared by the participants provided similar results for consistency.

Based on the information gained from the participants, higher education leaders should apply the above strategies as a way to engage employees and increase performance. According to research, highly engaged employees exhibit higher levels of initiative and performance at work (Taneja et al., 2015). I recommend leaders use the cost-effective above leadership strategies to promote employee engagement by (a) engaging in a healthy relationship between leaders and employees, (b) effective communication process, (c) being transparent, (d) understanding behaviors to overcome challenges, (e) rewarding and recognizing employees to increase performance. I recommend higher education leaders, scholars, and experts to use the finding and recommendations to provide other leadership strategies to promote employee engagement, thus giving a new perspective on business practices and positive social change.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol Form

Interview Protocol

Date:

Participant Name:

Positional Title:

Year in Position:

Leadership Strategies

Introductory Protocol

To facilitate note-taking, I would like to audio record our conversations today. This was outlined in the informed consent process. Fundamentally, this document states that: (a) all information is confidential, (b) your participation is voluntary and you may halt the interview at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (c) I do not intend to inflict any harm. Member checking will be completed by a follow-up interview to confirm accuracy of data by reviewing the interview transcripts and data interpretations with participants. For your information, only I will be privy to the recordings which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. I have planned this interview to last no longer than 60 minutes. During this time, I have a few questions that I would like to cover. You should have ample time to answer all questions in as much detail as you wish without fear of interruption. Thank you for agreeing to participate.

Introduction

Hello, my name is Tiffany McCutcheon. I am a Doctoral student with Walden University. I am conducting voluntary semistructured interviews of individuals who have experience with leadership strategies that promote employee engagement. You are being asked to participate in this study because: you are an active senior leader and have responsibility for leading and maintaining a department within higher education. You have a minimum of five years' experience as a senior leader within higher education. The purpose of my study is to explore the lived experiences of leadership strategies that promote employee engagement. The interview is designed to last approximately 45 minutes, 60 minutes at the very longest. I will be recording the interview for accurate transcription and analysis. Everything we discuss is completely confidential and will not be able to be traced back to you personally. At this point I would like to ask:

Are you still willing to participate in this study? Y/N

Do you have any questions before we begin? Y/N

If you are ready to begin, I will **start the recorder** and we will begin

Research Question

What leadership strategies do higher education sector organizational leaders use to promote employee engagement?

Interview Question

1. What leadership strategies do you use to promote employee engagement?
2. What is your experience as a leader in higher education using strategy for engaging employees?
3. What challenges have you experienced using leadership strategies to promote employee engagement?
4. What leadership procedures have you implemented to reward employees for expected performance behaviors?
5. Which of the approaches was the most effective?
6. What other information would you like to discuss regarding your leadership strategies that promote employee engagement?

This completes the interview for today. When will you be available for your follow-up interview? Date: Time:

Do you have anything else you would like to say or add at this time?

Thank you very much for your time and participation in my doctoral study, and I look forward to the follow-up interview.

Follow-up Interview Protocol

To facilitate note-taking, I would like to audio record our conversations today. This was outlined in the informed consent process. Fundamentally, this document states that: (a) all information is confidential, (b) your participation is voluntary and you may halt the interview at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (c) I do not intend to inflict any harm. This follow-up interview is a member checking method to confirm accuracy of data by reviewing the interview transcripts and data interpretations with participants. For your information, only I will be privy to the recordings which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. I have planned this interview to last no longer than 60 minutes. During this time, I have a few questions that I would like to cover. You should have ample time to answer all questions in as much detail as you wish without fear of interruption. Thank you for agreeing to participate.

Introduction

Hello again, my name is Tiffany McCutcheon. I am a Doctoral student with Walden University. I am conducting voluntary semistructured interviews of individuals who have experience with leadership strategies that promote employee engagement. You are being asked to participate in this study because: you are an active senior leader and have responsibility for leading and maintaining a department within higher education. You have a minimum of 5 years' experience as a senior leader within higher education. The purpose of my study is to explore the lived experiences of leadership strategies that promote employee engagement. The interview is designed to last approximately 45 minutes, 60 minutes at the very longest. I will be recording the interview for accurate transcription and analysis. Everything we discuss is completely confidential and will not be able to be traced back to you personally. At this point I would like to ask:

Are you still willing to participate in this study? Y/N

Do you have any questions before we begin? Y/N

If you are ready to begin, I will **start the recorder** and we will begin

Research Question

What leadership strategies do higher education sector organizational leaders use to promote employee engagement?

Interview Question

1. What leadership strategies do you use to promote employee engagement?

2. What is your experience as a leader in higher education using strategy for engaging employees?
3. What challenges have you experienced using leadership strategies to promote employee engagement?
4. What leadership procedures have you implemented to reward employees for expected performance behaviors?
5. Which of the approaches was the most effective?
6. What other information would you like to discuss regarding your leadership strategies that promote employee engagement?

This completes the interview for today. Do you have anything else you would like to say or add at this time?

Thank you very much for your time and participation in my doctoral study.

Post Interview Comments and/or Observations:

Appendix B: Invitation to Participate in the Study

<Date>

<Address Block>

Dear <Participant>

As part of my doctoral study research at Walden University, I would like to invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting. The purpose of the study is to explore the leadership strategies that promote employee engagement within a higher education sector. I contacted you to participate because you are a senior leader at a higher educational facility within West Tennessee. Participation in the research study is voluntary and is confidential.

Please read the enclosed consent form carefully and ask any questions that you may have before acting on the invitation to participate. To achieve the objectives of the research study, your participation depends on satisfying certain criteria in addition to being a senior leader at a higher educational facility. To include: (a) leader with hiring and supervisory responsibility, (b) leadership experience for five years or more, and (c) participants must be 18 years of age, with no maximum age requirement.

If you satisfy these criteria and you would like to participate in this study, please call me at XXX-XXXX or email to XXX@waldenu.edu to schedule a convenient time for interview. I anticipate that the total time required for each interview will span no more than one hour. The interviews will be audio recorded, and participants will have the opportunity to review the transcribed interview for accuracy prior to inclusion in the study. I appreciate your valuable time and thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Tiffany McCutcheon