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Strategies for Increasing Employee Productivity in Small Technology Consulting Businesses

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Abstract

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MISM, Keller Graduate School, 2014

BS, DeVry University, 2008

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Unproductive employees in technology consulting small businesses negatively affect organizational output and profits. Investing in employee productivity is beneficial to ensuring an organization's ability to improve their profits and sustainability as business leaders have an influential role in identifying and addressing the root causes of employee productivity issues in their organizations. The conceptual framework that grounded this doctoral study was Thomas Gilbert's behavioral engineering model. The participants in this study consisted of 8 leaders in a Texas technology consulting small business with experience in increasing employee productivity. Data were collected through in-person semistructured interviews and business documents. Methodological triangulation was accomplished through a constant comparison analysis with data analyzed using Atlas.ti. Four emergent themes in the study related to improving employee productivity were precise interpersonal communication with employees, pragmatic approaches to employee proficiencies and deficiencies, mentoring and empowering employees, and a flat hierarchy and organizational values. Implications for positive social change include the potential for small business leaders to improve employee productivity, which can contribute to increased initiative, a positive workplace, encouraged employees, improved efficiency, business growth, and new employment opportunities in surrounding communities.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my husband, Joe, and our two daughters, Serena and Celine, who inspire me every day.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Employee productivity affects business potential and underlying profits. Business leaders have an influential role in identifying and addressing the root causes of employee productivity issues in their organization (Loerzel, 2019). Understanding the causes of employee productivity issues can assist leaders in implementing sustainable strategies to improve overall business profits and potential growth. Finding and implementing suitable employee productivity strategies is essential for organizational profitability, as disengaged employees result in reduced workplace productivity (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). In this qualitative research study, I explored the strategies that leaders in one technology consulting small business used to improve their employee productivity.

Background of the Problem

Employee performance and motivation are essential for organizations to stay productive and competitive. In a 2016 State of the American workplace study, only 35% of Texas employees were engaged at work (Gallup, 2017).

In 2018, small businesses employed 4.7 million Texans and were the fastest growing sector in the state (Small Business Association, 2018). It is imperative for technology consulting small business leaders, especially in a fast-growing sector, to identify issues affecting employee productivity as it affects profits and hinders potential growth (Henrekson & Johansson, 2010).

Problem Statement

Business leaders are looking for ways to improve employee productivity and enhance organizational profits (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Through successful

leadership strategies, productive employees generate 10-15% more profit per year than unproductive employees (Kumar & Pansari, 2018). The general business problem is that unproductive employees in technology consulting small businesses negatively affect organizational output and profits. The specific business problem was that some technology consulting small business leaders lack strategies to improve employee productivity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies technology consulting small business leaders use to increase employee productivity. The targeted population consisted of all of the leaders working at a small technology consulting business in south Texas, who have developed and deployed successful strategies to improve employee productivity. The implications for positive social change include the potential to assist technology consulting small businesses leaders' understanding of effective strategies to improve employee productivity, which could lead to increased profits, business growth, and new employment opportunities in surrounding communities.

Nature of the Study

The three main types of research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Qualitative researchers seek to identify and explore interpersonal perspectives (Bailey, Maffen, Alfes, & Fletcher, 2017) by utilizing open-ended inquiry techniques. To understand employee motivation from a leader's perspective, I chose a qualitative method to apply open-ended questions.

Alternatively, quantitative researchers employ methods such as close-ended questions to develop testable hypotheses (Park & Park, 2016; Yilmaz, 2013). I did not choose a quantitative method since this study did not require close-ended questions or hypothesis testing. Lastly, mixed method researchers apply both qualitative and quantitative methods (Izgar, & Akturk, 2018), which was not suitable for use in the proposed study because the quantitative portion was not applicable.

I considered four research designs for my study on small business employee productivity: (a) case study, (b) narrative, (c) ethnography, and (d) phenomenology. Case study researchers generate detailed insights for a greater understanding of complex processes (Harrison, Birks, Franklin, & Mills, 2017). Therefore, a case study was the appropriate choice because I investigated strategies that business leaders used to improve employee productivity. Narrative researchers utilize participants' shared stories to chronicle events (Nyström, 2018). I did not choose a narrative design as the intention of the study was to explore productivity strategies and did not require participants' personal shared stories. Ethnographic researchers interpret the everyday behavior of cultures or social groups (Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2017). I did not choose an ethnographic design as the goal of the study was to review productivity strategies and not the workplace culture. Phenomenological researchers emphasize the meanings participants' lived experiences with phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). I did not choose the phenomenological approach, as I focused on productivity improvement strategies rather than the meanings of lived experiences.

Research Question

The overarching question for this study was: What strategies do technology consulting small business leaders use to increase employee productivity?

Interview Questions

Technology consulting small business leaders responded to the following questions regarding employee productivity strategies in a semistructured interview format.

1. How do you measure employee productivity?

2. What strategies have you employed that resulted in increased productivity among your employees?

3. What strategies that you implemented resulted in the most improvement in employee productivity?

4. What organizational changes occurred as a result of increased employee productivity?

5. What were the key challenges you had to address to implement the strategies for increasing employee productivity?

6. What else would you like to share regarding employee productivity improvement strategies that we did not already cover?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this qualitative study was Thomas Gilbert's behavioral engineering model (BEM). The BEM measures the competence of human performance and identifies six levels to complete a full employee performance analysis.

The levels include philosophical, policy, strategic, cultural, logical, and tactical, with the theory indicating that an issue at one point is related to a different point (Gilbert, 1978). Thomas Gilbert's BEM enables researchers to associate performance with business sector outcomes (Crossman, 2010). According to the BEM workplace productivity, concerning employee engagement, results from an employee's level of cognitive focus as it pertains to personal presence, emotional connection to others, and work tasks (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2018). A general goal of research revolves around how to define, organize, and fit current and existing knowledge into a study (Zott, Amit, & Massa, 2011). Adom, Hussein, and Joe (2018) noted the relationships among analytical research procedures, participants' meanings, and data collection methods, which comprise the qualitative conceptual framework, and theoretical support of the study. The use of Gilbert's BEM can explain employee productivity based on perceived experiences and is an appropriate way to understand factors affecting employee productivity.

The original BEM, created by Thomas Gilbert in 1978, is depicted in Figure 1 and illustrates how information, instrumentation, and motivation influence an individual and their setting. The model delineates how each variable affects an employee and their environment, with the objective of revealing workplace deficiencies to improve employee performance. Gilbert (1978) stressed the importance of these variables regarding employee productivity, engagement, and proficiency.

Behavior Engineering Model

	Information	Instrumentation	Motivation
Environmental Supports	Data 1. Relevant and frequent feedback about the adequacy of performance 2. Descriptions of what is expected of performance 3. Clear and relevant guides to adequate performance	Resources 1. Tools and materials of work designed scientifically to match human factors	Incentives 1. Adequate financial incentives made contingent upon performance 2. Non-monetary incentives made available 3. Career-development opportunities
Person's Repertory of Behavior	Knowledge 1. Systematically designed training that matches the requirements of exemplary performance 2. Placement	Capacity 1. Flexible scheduling of performance to match peak capacity 2. Prosthesis 3. Physical shaping 4. Adaptation 5. Selection	Motives 1. Assessment of people's motives to work 2. Recruitment of people to match the realities of the situation

Figure 1. The original 1978 version of Thomas Gilbert's behavioral engineering model (BEM). This figure illustrates how behavior and environment are affected by information, instrumentation, and motivation. Reprinted from "Behavior Engineering Model Human Competence: Engineering Worthy Performance*"* by T. F. Gilbert, 1978, p. 88.

Operational Definitions

This operational definition section contains definitions of the referenced terms in this doctoral study.

Employee disengagement: Employee disengagement is the lack of employee initiative to complete general work tasks or undertake additional responsibilities (Lemon & Palenchar, 2018).

Employee engagement: Employee engagement is the concept of a positive emotional relationship between an employee and their work organizations that influence an increase in work task efforts (Krishnaveni & Monica, 2016).

Employee motivation: Employee motivation is a psychological concept that determines workplace obstacle perseverance and effort level (Sotirofski, 2018).

Employee productivity: Employee productivity is the measure of productive employee output and effort while completing work tasks (Akkas, Chakma, & Hossain, 2015).

Organizational climate: The organizational climate is an employee's perception of the social and psychological aspects of the company environment (Patterson, Warr, & West, 2004).

Perceived supervisor support: Perceived supervisor support is an employee's view of a leader's level of socio-emotional motivation and availability (Jin & McDonald, 2016).

Small businesses: Small businesses are businesses in the United States with 500 or fewer employees (Small Business Association, 2018).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

This case study included the consideration of applicable assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. Assumptions are what the researcher assumes to be accurate, based on

observations, experiences, or previous research (Khorsandi & Aven, 2017). Limitations are weaknesses found to potentially restrict the findings of the study and affect the validity (Greener, 2018). Delimitations refer to the boundaries and scope of the case study method and desired research (Babbie, 2015). Assumptions and limitations are out of the researcher's control; however, delimitations are within the researcher's control to define study boundaries (Simon, 2011).

Assumptions

The foundation of this qualitative single case study formulated assumptions. One assumption in this study was that participants provided accurate and honest responses to all interview questions. An additional assumption included that businesses documentation, records, and artifacts are valid and correctly deciphered.

Limitations

Individual biases, intervening processes, and personal integrity can affect a study's results (Shaw & Satalkar, 2018). Greener (2018) noted that study limitations include factors such as research design, methodology, data collection findings, and established conclusions. The brief timeframe slated for data collection, and the decision to limit the study to leadership responses, disregarded alternative insights of employee productivity, and reduced the type of available data. More so, the data I collected was representative of a specific timeframe and may not apply to other settings or industries.

Delimitations

Delimitations of this study included the limited geographical location of the study, the restricted focus of leaders in single technology consulting small business, and

possible non-transferability of results to other organizations. Although the sample size was limited to leaders in a single technology consulting small business, the results were adequate to explore employee productivity strategies. However, the results may not transfer for practical use in other organizations due to the distinctive characteristics of the organizational culture, functions, and employees. Marshall and Rossman (2016) noted that researchers leave the transferability of results for other researchers to determine appropriate for their study. Additionally, the geographical location of the study was south Texas, which may cause unique employee productivity concerns that other small businesses organizations in differing locations may not experience.

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to explore strategies technology consulting small business leaders use to increase employee productivity. The need for employee productivity strategies is vital since organizational success depends on the performance of employees and their development of new skills and techniques (Aktar & Pangil, 2018). There is a direct connection between employee productivity and business performance, indicated by measures including profitability and engagement (Casey & Sieber, 2016), as engaged employees work at a higher proficiency.

Contribution to Business Practice

Identifying strategies to increase employee productivity in technology consulting small businesses could help organizations improve overall performance efficiency, profits, employee engagement, and employee morale. Victor and Hoole (2017) found that increased work productivity improved overall employee motivation, engagement, and job

satisfaction. Furthermore, obtaining answers regarding how supervisor support and rewards influence employee productivity could increase supervisor efficiency (Casey & Sieber, 2016), which affect organizational production and profits. Identifying strategies to increase employee productivity may provide ideas for other technology consulting small business leaders to adopt similar strategies to improve their organizations' output and profits.

Impact on Social Change

Improving employee productivity in a small business environment might increase local community job potential through enabling new opportunities. Efficient firms gain market share and are able to hire more employees as the demand for products and services increase (Tang, 2015). Additionally, business sustainability positively affects the local community as local shopping provides increased tax dollars within communities for public funding (Walzer, Blanke, & Evans, 2018). Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts (2018) noted that retail sales taxes in 2018 accounted for roughly 58% of state funds.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore strategies technology consulting small business leaders use to increase productivity among their employees. The conceptual framework for this employee productivity study was the behavioral engineering model (BEM) founded by Thomas Gilbert in 1978. In this model, employee engagement directly affects organizational efficacy and profit, and is used as an intervention to motivate cognitively absent employees (Shoaib & Kohni, 2017).

Consistent with Gilbert's (1978) BEM, employee productivity is essential to work performance and organizational sustainability, as less productive employees can cost organizations $12,000 dollars yearly per employee (Gatewood, Field, & Barrick, 2018). Thus, organizational productivity is negatively affected by actions such as deviant behaviors, reduced quality and quantity of work, and loafing (Khattak, Batool, Rehman, Fayaz, & Asif, 2017). It is essential for organizations to focus on developing employee productivity strategies to ensure high performance in competitive business environments (Rai, Ghosh, Chauhan, & Mehta, 2017) as organizational success depends on the performance of employees in developing and adopting new approaches, techniques, and skills (Aktar & Pangil, 2018).

This study's critical analysis consisted of peer-reviewed journals, government sources, books, and articles regarding methods, importance, and influences on employee productivity. To find relevant literature for this study, I searched Walden University's library to access databases for peer-reviewed journals including ProQuest Central, Emerald Management, ABI/Inform Global, EBSCO, and recently published thesis for continuing research recommendations and general ideas. I also used Google Scholar to find literature for this study. Using keywords such as *employee productivity, employee motivation, employee rewards, perceived supervisor support, employee improvement, leadership motivation, employee production,* and *employee engagement*, I was able to find reliable and recent literature to assist with my problem statement and general study.

For the literature review, I systematically explored employee productivity through a leader's perspective. The literature review included all peer-reviewed or government

sources with 61% published between 2017 and 2019. Seventeen percent of the references were authors' seminal works, with the remaining resources being within ten years from their initial publication. I chose these resources due to their timely relevance regarding leader implemented employee production strategies. I arranged the literature review by prevalent reoccurring themes and believe these themes are relevant employee motivation strategies, and appropriate for this research focus. My review of the literature involved an exhaustive investigation that explored employee productivity through a leader's perspective. The literature review includes applicable overviews and reoccurring themes, (a) behavioral and engineering model, (b) employee productivity theories, (c) employee motivation theories, (d) employee engagement theories, (e) rewards, (f) perceived supervisor perception, and (g) organizational climate.

Behavioral Engineering Model

I chose Thomas Gilbert's (1978) BEM as the conceptual framework for this study as the model can predict barriers and identify performance gaps that affect organizational operations (Chevalier, 2003). Crossman (2010) discussed the ability of the BEM to connect performance with financial results and mentioned that exemplary performance is rooted in the alignment between the environmental and behavioral components of the BEM. Researchers using the BEM in their studies have revised Gilbert's original BEM to convey societal updates in employee business behavior and attitudes. Turner and Baker (2016) explained that practitioners and researchers restructured the BEM due to its progressive framework that can depict how theories guide observations. Figure 2 depicts an updated BEM version by Fusch and Gillespie (2012) that includes the addition of the

hard and *soft* side of management, which suggests how environmental support and worker behavior affects employee information, instrumentation, and motivation. Fusch and Gillespie's updated BEM figure depicts factors, environmental support, and worker behavior, as the leading causes of human performance issues. Fusch and Gillespie continued to explicate how Gilbert's BEM model allowed researchers opportunities to expand, and included helpful information for administration improvements, such as management strategies under the *Hard Side of Management* line, and employee-focused approaches under the *Soft Side of Management* line. Furthermore, Fusch and Gillespie defined the hard side of management as environmental factors that are improved by the organization via management decisions and environmental improvements. The soft side of management referred to opportunities for worker-controlled behavior improvements in an organization (Fusch & Gillespie, 2012).
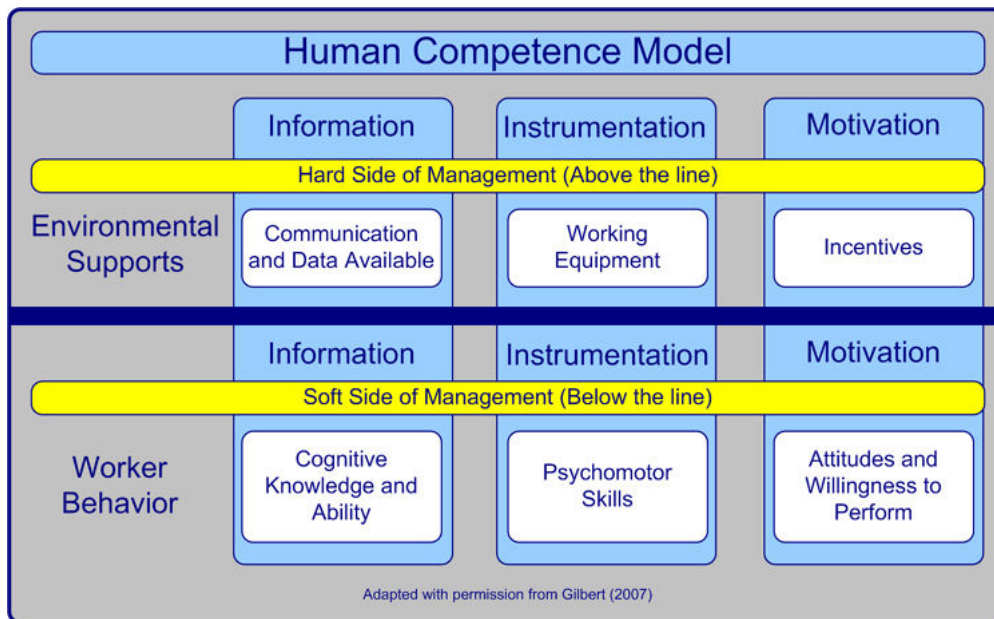
Figure 2. An updated version of Thomas Gilbert's (1978) behavioral engineering model. Reprinted with permission from "A Practical Approach to Performance Interventions and Analysis: 50 Models for Building a High-Performance Culture," by G. E. Fusch and R. C. Gillespie, 2012, p. 2.

In a qualitative doctoral study on the reduced performance of Coast Guard marine inspections, Beck (2016) chose Fusch and Gillespie's (2012) human competence model as the conceptual framework for the study. To explain the utility of the human competence model for studying performance improvements, Beck posited the usefulness of the model's segmented factors, information, instrumentation, and motivation, in depicting perceived performance. Beck (2016) also noted the importance of understanding an organization's goals and found that issues including lack of clarity could affect overall performance.

In addition to Fusch and Gillespie (2012), researchers such as Binder (1998) and Chevalier (2003), have updated the original BEM with changes including content adaptations, and model cell reordering. In a BEM adaptation, Binder adjusted the name to the *six boxes* model and updated the original six cells. With the focus of explaining behavioral influences via the six boxes model, Binder revised the cells to (a) expectation and feedback, (b) tools and resources, (c) consequences and incentives, (d) skills and knowledge, (e) capacity, and (f) motives and preferences. Additionally, Binder also argued that the six boxes model is ideal for business applications, such as implementation alignment for performance improvement initiatives, and improvement of organizational change communications.

To expand on BEM variations, Chevalier (2003) indicated that his updated layout provided a more efficient way for organizations to troubleshoot and improve performance issues, with the six factors listed in order of impact. To explain, Chevalier espoused how the order of the updated factors provided leverage for a solution, and detailed the unnecessary difficulties of accessing an employee's motives without verifying all potential employee dissatisfaction factors.

	Information	Resources	Incentives
Environment	**Information** 1. Roles and performance expectations are clearly defined; employees are given relevant and frequent feedback about the adequacy of performance. 2. Clear and relevant guides are used to describe the work process. 3. The performance management system guides employee performance and development.	**Resources** 1. Materials, tools and time needed to do the job are present. 2. Processes and procedures are clearly defined and enhance individual performance if followed. 3. Overall physical and psychological work environment contributes to improved performance; work conditions are safe, clean, organized, and conducive to performance.	**Incentives** 1. Financial and non-financial incentives are present; measurement and reward systems reinforce positive performance. 2. Jobs are enriched to allow for fulfillment of employee needs. 3. Overall work environment is positive, where employees believe they have an opportunity to succeed; career development opportunities are present.
Individual	**Knowledge / Skills** 1. Employees have the necessary knowledge, experience and skills to do the desired behaviors 2. Employees with the necessary knowledge, experience and skills are properly placed to use and share what they know. 3. Employees are cross-trained to understand each other's roles.	**Capacity** 1. Employees have the capacity to learn and do what is needed to perform successfully. 2. Employees are recruited and selected to match the realities of the work situation. 3. Employees are free of emotional limitations that would interfere with their performance.	**Motives** 1. Motives of employees are aligned with the work and the work environment. 2. Employees desire to perform the required jobs. 3. Employees are recruited and selected to match the realities of the work situation.

Figure 3. An updated version of Thomas Gilbert's (1978) behavioral engineering model. Reprinted from "Updating the Behavior Engineering Model," by R. D. Chevalier, 2013, *Performance Improvement, 42*(5), p. 3

Classic employee productivity theories and methods included innovative insights to organizational strategies, and new disciplines to stay strategic during changing economic times. Seminal management theories, such as Frederick Taylor's (1911) scientific management theory, created the foundation used to develop current models. In the industrial age, Hatch (2018) stated that executives asked normative questions about the best strategies to manage and enhance employee productivity, while economists wanted to know how industrialization was changing societal processes. The diverse interests combined a new field, organization theory, which created tensions among the

classification between practice and theory (Hatch, 2018). To explain the need for changes in disciplines during the post-industrial revolutions, Taylor (1911) argued that existing methods were inefficient regarding the efforts of an organization's human assets and noted the importance of competent employees.

Additionally, Taylor (1911) advocated that to increase productivity, organizational leaders needed to focus on employee satisfaction through methods such as higher wages for workers of their job classification, and employee training. Ferdous (2016) posited that Taylor was the first person to use a systematic approach to study human behavior at work and explained that the scientific management theory included a focus on the concepts of work planning, standardization, specialization, and simplification. Moreover, Roper (2008) noted that the early advocates of professional management, especially the scientific management theory, expounded the prescriptive views of scientific methods, and realized their usefulness for diverse organizational applications. To explain workforce productivity issues, Taylor used an organizational metaphor, known as the machine metaphor, to explain how an efficient workforce requires maintenance comparable to an automobile. Additionally, Taylor also expressed his thoughts about the increased need for systems and management techniques with defined principles, laws, and rules. Koumparoulis and Solomos (2012) explained that employee productivity measurements increased fourfold after using experimental methods from Taylor's (1911) scientific management theory. Moreover, Taylor (1911) discussed the idea of organizations and employees obtaining maximum prosperity through high development of every segment of the organization.

Highly critical of Taylor's (1911) scientific management theory, Gramsci (1937/1975) referenced the theory as *Taylorism* and considered the philosophy as promoting advanced capitalism. Gramsci noted Taylorism as crude and argued that the concept exploited workers, specifically the old working class, by focusing on the organizational surplus values instead of proficiencies. Gramsci argued that the solution for economic stability is to introduce a socialist method of production through the strict order and organization of the countries labor-power. Additionally, Gramsci expressed the importance of maintaining the ability to demand fulfillment of orders and offering a higher quantity of the social product to proficient employees. In additional opposition, Braverman (1974) noted the contradictions of theories regarding the need for higher levels of training, education, and mental efforts during the scientific-technical revolution, and stated that that they fail to engage the employee's current capacities using their existing levels of education and experience. Moreover, Braverman expressed concern about whether technology advancements and the importance of an educated versus traditionally skillful employee had polarized labor trends and noted that employee value does not increase due to amplified management expectations. To explain, Foster (1998) indicated that Braverman argued Taylorism was unorthodox to social science and humanities and indicated that the scientific management theory degraded the skills of the working class by promoting education instead of skill. In agreement with the stated shortcomings of methods identified in the scientific management theory by opposition, researchers studying the effects of the method on workers in that era stated that

opportunistic managers used ideals in the system to mistreat workers and dehumanize

employees (Wagner-Tsukamoto, 2007; Morgan, 2006).

The misuse or syncretization of Taylor's (1911) scientific management theory

from arbitrary applications decreased job satisfaction and prompted employee strikes

(Rollinson, 2005). Employee strikes, such as the early 1911 strike at the Watertown

Arsenal in Watertown, Mass., received copious amounts of newspaper coverage, which

led to congressional hearings. (Koumparoulis & Solomos, 2012). After defending the

scientific management theory to the U.S. house of representatives and labeled the *enemy*

of the working man, Taylor's (1911) scientific management theory, deemed as the *science*

of exploitation, waned in popularity in the 1920's (Bakan, 2004; Morgan, 2006).

BEM environmental support factors. Referenced in Gilbert's (1978) seminal

work, environmental support pertains to the support that organizations should offer and

includes data, instruments, and incentives (Cox, Frank, & Philibert, 2006). Wooderson,

Cuskelly, and Meyer (2017) noted that data instruments include tools and resources

required to perform work tasks, while incentives and consequences, when used

appropriately, can encourage higher performance levels. Diamantidis and Chatzoglou

(2019) stated that job environment directly affects employee productivity as it can

influence employee attitudes and organizational commitment. Prior to the BEM method

and focus on the employee work environment, Pershing (2016) explained that a common

technique to improve worker productivity was through employee training or retraining

efforts. More so, Pershing argued that increases in productivity were inconsistent, which

enticed Gilbert (1978) to postulate and eventually verify that improving the work environment was crucial to increasing employee performance.

Gilbert (1978) explained that addressing environmental factors before behavior components may offer an increase in leveraged solutions for managers to improve productivity. The BEM can address general performance, competence, and operational insufficiencies, conceivably sourced from management deficiency (Cox et al., 2006). Crossman (2010) stated that improvements in human competency is achievable through enhancements in employee behavior at the performer level, and work culture at the organizational level. Training opportunities to build knowledge and job efficiency skills may increase employee proactivity levels, resulting in enhanced productivity (Diamantidis & Chatzoglou, 2019).

BEM repertory worker behavior. In the BEM conceptual model of worker behavior, Gilbert (1978) posited that human competence could be accurately measured, and noted that competence is equivalent to desirable behavior, which is the ratio of accomplishments to adverse reactions. To elaborate on the BEM model, Crossman (2010) stated that enhanced behavior-based initiatives, with culture improvements and safety interventions, could promote positive employee behaviors. BEM insights included the effects on employee behavior via management decisions and mandated procedures (Turner & Baker, 2016) with adapted BEM models emphasizing individual employee behavior to source and mitigate negative behaviors.

Employee Productivity

Employee productivity research trends have increased due to a progressively competitive marketplace, updated technology, and high consumer demands (Plotnikova & Romanenko, 2019). Therefore, to stay competitive, businesses leaders aim to find strategies to increase and sustain productive employee output. Yaakobi and Weisberg (2018) noted that a leader's evaluation of their employees' effectiveness is related to their general performance and measurable productivity predictors (a) quality, (b) innovation, and (c) efficiency. To explain methods to increase worker effectiveness, Taylor (1911) expounded that the training and development of workers will increase the pace and quality of work for maximum efficiency for the organization. The practicality of organization's investment in human resources, such as training and job alignment, is useful in increasing overall productivity (Cesário & Chambel, 2019; Yaakobi & Weisberg, 2018).

Overlooked business methods and strategies can cause unnecessary losses in employee productivity and profits. Shmailan (2016) explained that researchers conducting similar employee productivity and engagement studies have attempted to explain the complex dynamics and possible theories that affect productivity and performance measurement. Attaran (2019) indicated that many organizations undesirably affect employee productivity and efficiency by not considering subsidiary resources, such as information management, as important organizational assets. Organizations erroneously reduce employee productivity, and therefore profitability, by not ensuring productive work practices for employees to conduct their daily duties (Attaran, 2019).

In seminal employee productivity studies, such as Mayo's (1930) human relationship theory (HRT) and the goal setting theory, the study focus was on the needs of employees as a method to increase profits. To change the perceptive of employee productivity from the organization to the employee, researchers conducted scientific trials to determine whether work conditions affected the productivity of employees. In a series of trials lasting from 1927 to 1932, Mayo (1930) aimed to determine whether a relationship existed between employee productivity and work relationships. While analyzing studies conducted in the 1920's era, Landsberger (1950), coined the studies the *Hawthorne effect* as the study trials were conducted in Hawthorne Works, a factory complex in Cicero, Ill. Mayo (1930) noted that the intention of the research was to learn more about occurrences and general conditions in the workplace that could affect human work capacity. While completing research for the HPT, Mayo detailed employee production improvements when physical conditions, such as break lengths and working hours, positively changed. To account for mental conditions, Mayo also identified positive supervisor relationships as a factor of improved employee motivation. Additionally, Mayo (1933) stated that focus on output and production due to changing industrial needs caused employees fatigue, deemed industrial and physiological fatigue, from poor work conditions.

In criticism of the HRT, Franke and Kaul (1978) posited that although the theory fronted the acceptance that organizational influences affected employee performance, there was no indication of economic benefit from the stated physical changes or increased output from an improved supervisor relationship. Franke and Kaul also indicated that bias

from observation and qualitative theories skewed the study's results and explained that quantitative methods allow researchers to separate the facts of the study from fictional assumptions. Via a research paper focused on understanding criticisms of the Hawthorne effect, Muldoon (2017) suggested that the introduction of a new progressive theory in the era of industrial change would attract criticism from advocates of traditional theories. Overall, the various experiments comprising the Hawthorne effect centered on implementing socio-physiological aspects of human behavior to improve overall employee productivity strategies.

In an article explaining the effect of employee management theories to employee productivity, Buchner (2007) argued that the goal setting theory could stimulate employee productivity through the creation and attention to priorities. Buchner also explained that difficult goals could lead to sustained task performance. In an empirical study focused on goal setting theories, Locke, Feren, McCaleb, Shaw, and Denny (1980) used existing literature from researchers such as Sales (1970), and Latham and Locke (1975) to analyze goal-setting techniques for variables such as employee personality and productivity. Locke et al. (1980) explained that goal setting included concepts such as performance standards, production quotas, and work norms as concepts of purposeful intent. In a separate study, Locke, Shaw, Saari, and Latham (1981) noted the effects of goal setting in business situations as valid and useful as Locke et al. (1980) found that the results of implemented goal setting techniques in a study increased overall productivity by 16%. Buchner (2017) mentioned that goal getting is traditionally management led; however, Butcher further noted that understanding how employees respond to goal

setting could help leaders understand influences that may encourage employees to set specific goals for themselves.

Employee Motivation

Theories formed by employee motivation researchers, such as Becker's (1964) human capital theory (HCT), and Vrooms (1964) expectancy theory, emphasized the importance of employee happiness and enthusiasm regarding their jobs. Organizations with satisfied employees experience higher productivity and overall profits, with motivated employees naturally improving work efficiency and culture (Rotea, Logofatu and Ploscaru, 2018; Huang, Ahlstrom, Lee, Chen, & Hsieh, 2016). Additionally, organizations that offer employee training and development resources increase overall employee motivation (Kim, Park, & Kang, 2016).

To explain the HCT, Marginson (2019) noted that the foundation of the theorys' narrative is the idea that education effects the productivity of labor, which influences earnings. The successful completion of dynamic tasks over a period typically indicates performance in an organization, with human capital as the combination of an individual's knowledge, skills, and abilities; among other characteristics (Wolfson & Mathieu, 2018; Ployhart, Nyberg, Reilly & Maltarich, 2014). In essence, HCT research can be relevant for use in understanding (a) the employee perspective, (b) the employer business perspective, and (c) the economic development perspective (Erickson, 2008; Lin, Cook, & Burt, 2008). To expand, Marginson (2019) maintained that since the 1960's, researchers considering the HCT valued education as the driver of marginal labor productivity, which drives earnings. Via *Principles of Political Economy with Some of*

Their Applications to Social Philosophy, Mill (1848) stated that the intelligence of a worker is the most important aspect of labor productivity, along with general trust and intelligence. In a study focused on understanding human capital from an economist's view, Schultz (1959) posited that an investment in human capital, when individuals invest in themselves, augment the amount of national wealth usually measured by production capabilities. Shultz offered examples, such as on-the-job training, as a way to collect human capital. New and useful knowledge is strategically important in improving the quality of employment (Schultz, 1959). Moreover, Tan (2019) remarked that the research basis of the HCT is that education increases productivity and an individuals' earning, making education an investment that in turn is crucial to economic growth.

In a qualitative study assessing HCT, Marginson (2019) stated that implementation of HCT increased the demand for educated workers, which rationalized the expansion of higher education initiatives, and supported optimistic views of education increasing societal efficiency. Lin (2017) added that the notion of the HCT conceives capital, such as education, as an investment in technical skills and knowledge for negotiation with firms and agents for payment of their skills. In theory, the payment for school has more value than the purchase of life commodities, which in turn can be spent for leisure and lifestyle needs for the individual (Lin, 2017). Mill (1848) explained that laboring classes could improve their monetary conditions through a belief of future gains greater than the current sacrifice. Mill continued by stating that present sacrifices are necessary for future good. To show the value of education, Becker (1964) calculated age-human-wealth profiles of various education levels to depict the present value of potential

future earnings. More so, Becker shared optimisms on the HCT extension in non-market sectors such as health, fertility, and marriage productivity.

In a study adversely critiquing HCT, Bowles and Gintis (1975) argued concepts of the HCT theory to be misleading as an empirical research framework and a policy guide. More so, Bowles and Gintis also expressed concern that using the theory is a big step in eliminating class as a fundamental economic concept, and noted that previously regulated social institutions, such as school and family, were a publicly analyzed economic concept. Sadovink & Coughlan (2016) expounded that Bowles and Gintis (1975) argued against the new sociology concepts of a focus on educational knowledge, and debated that schools reproduce embedded capitalistic, social, and economic inequalities. In agreement with Bowles and Gintis (1975), Marginson (2019) indicated that the HCT theory is unrealistic due to the use of a closed system and single theoretical research lens to explain a complex idea, such as the augmented effects of education on productivity. Marginson also posited that the issue stems from a gap of logic between the theory's best practice environment and real-world economics.

Arguments against the HCT were similar to arguments against the use of Frederick Taylor's (1911) scientific management theory, which focused on a systematic approach of employee behavior and satisfaction through advanced job competency that involved training and higher wages. Gramsci (1937/1975), disapproving of the scientific management theory, expressed apprehension about the exploitation of the working class through preferences of work planning and not worker proficiencies. Braverman (1974) explained that the scientific management theory disregarded a worker's skill and

promoted education, which failed to consider the differences between educated and traditional skilled employees concerning employee value. Researcher arguments against both HCT and the scientific management theory expressed concern about the use of the theory promoting advanced capitalism.

An additional example of theories focused on employee motivation is Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory. The underpinning of the expectancy theory is an emphasis of an individual's assessments, regarding extrinsic and intrinsic motivators, to their actions and expectations of their environment (Purvis, Zagenczyk, & McCray, 2015). In his seminal work, Vroom (1964) defined motivation as a process of the governing of choices among other forms of voluntary activity. According to Llyod and Mertens (2018), researchers using the expectancy theory deemed that individuals made choices based on what they believed would provide the best outcomes. Lloyd and Mertens also noted Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory formula as *motivation = instrumentality * expectancy * valence*, with motivation as the driver of behavior. Moreover, Lloyd and Mertens also further defined the additional variables (a) expectancy as the worker's anticipation that their effort will lead to their desired performance, (b) instrumentality as the anticipation that a performance outcome will lead to an award, and (c) valence as the degree of preference to a given outcome. To explain, Lunenburg (2011) stated that Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory differed from other motivational theories by theorists such as Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs and Herzberg's (1959) two-factor theory, as the researchers using the expectancy theory use a process of cognitive variables to reflect individual differences, instead of specific suggestions to explain motivation. Lunenburg

continued by stating that there are four basis of assumptions for the expectancy theory (a) that people join organizations with expectations about their needs and motivations, (b) that an individual behavior is a conscious choice, (c) that people want different things from the organization, and (d) that people will choose alternatives that optimize personal outcomes.

In critique of Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory concerning employee motivation, Graen (1969) indicated that the theory of the current model was limited to measuring individual work behaviors in a defined work role instead of multiple work roles that are prevalent in a work environment. Graen continued by noting that the limits of the expectancy theory include the need of an outside agent to evaluate role outcomes by certain criteria, which limits the measurement of multiple work circumstances. More so, Lawler and Suttle (1973) explained that the major criticisms of the model are due to the lack of a clear definition in defining and distinguishing actions, outcomes, and their associated expectations.

Instead of using theories that aim to motivate or develop their workforce, organizational leaders also considered theories such as the credentialism theory, which dismissed both skills upgrading and increased education. Walters (2004) noted that advocates of the credentialism theory believe that education is not necessary to produce required skills for success in the labor market. Via *The Credential Society,* Collins (1979) explained that education expansion created a cycle of credential inflation, which stops the upward mobility that other theories such as HCT promote. Collins also indicated that the rising costs of education, grade inflation, and misleading job promises are the result of

higher credentials required for a job with requirements not based on skill but on education. Additionally, Walters (2004) argued that there are similarities of the HCT and the credentialism theory. Walters also clarified that both theories affect different education levels, with HCT being applicable to students that obtained jobs in their desired career field, and credentialism appropriate to students not working in their preferred job field.

Employee Engagement

Krishnaveni and Monica (2016) defined employee engagement as the notion of an employee's positive emotional relationship regarding their work organizations, which can influence efforts when completing work tasks. Anitha (2014) explained that engaged employees are aware of their job responsibilities, motivated colleagues, and are motivated to achieve business goals. In his seminal work on the BEM, Gilbert (1978) outlined employee engagement as a psychological presence of employees while conducting their daily work. To aid in employee engagement strategies, Gilbert suggested using engagement and absorption of employee factors as critical components in employee engagement studies.

Employee engagement studies by researchers such as Kahn (1990) and Saks (2006), established that additional variables, such as feeling valued, involved, and having a belief in the organization, among other variables, are key enablers of engagement. Additionally, Anitha (2014) stated that properly managed and engaged employees can be a valuable tool to gain a competitive advantage since they are unable to be duplicated by competitors. In a study aiming to identify motivating factors to increase employee

engagement, Khan (1990) found that employees would become engaged in their job roles

through physical, intellectual, and emotional dimensions, which organizations could

leverage by way of appropriate working conditions. Kahn also termed the behaviors that

employees decide to include or leave out of their job roles as *personal engagement* and

personal disengagement. The premise of personal engagement and personal

disengagement includes the preference of specific personal behaviors employees would

like to use given the appropriate conditions (Kahn, 1990). More so, Anitha (2014)

supported the notion that employees seek meaning through their work. Employees who

are personally engaged in their job role display their authentic thoughts and feelings, and

focus their personal energies into the physical, cognitive, and emotional aspects of their

job roles (Kahn, 1990). Furthermore, Khan (1990) expounded that the feelings of

personal engagement and disengagement affect the employee's performance and

engagement during their job roles.

Correspondingly, in a quantitative multiple-case employee engagement study,

Saks (2006) revealed a significant difference in engagement levels using antecedents

such as perceived organizational and supervisor support, rewards, and recognition. Saks

found that employee intentions, attitudes, and behaviors were related to job and

organizational engagement, which can lead to improved employer-employee

relationships. Additionally, in their quantitative study, Shoaib and Kohni, (2017)

identified a positive correlation between employee engagement and organizational

outcomes of goal setting initiatives. Using data from public and private sector employees,

and scientific instruments, such as the Utrecht work engagement scale, Shoaib and Kohni

discovered a direct association indicating that goal setting positively affects employee

engagement, which in turn, increases job satisfaction and organizational behavior.

Alternatively, disengagement is the withdrawal of one's character and typical

behaviors, which increase emotional absence and passive behavior (Krishnaveni &

Monica, 2016). Casey and Sieber (2016) used the results of an employee engagement

survey to explain that 24% of participants answered that they are actively disengaged at

work, while 63% of the participants stated they are unengaged. In research articles

concerning employee engagement, Welbourne and Schramm (2017), in addition to Aktar

and Pangil (2018), noted that employees engaged in the right type of work activities

would improve business profitability and growth. Likewise, Commons et al. (2018)

explained the need for updated employee screenings and evaluations as they may use

limited and narrow factors to determine job compatibility. Analysis tools utilized in

employee screenings can have validity issues due to possible limitations of the

assumptions used to identify employee competencies (Commons et al., 2018).

Additionally, Cesário and Chambel (2017) posited that the level of employee

engagement, through pride and job satisfaction, positively affects overall organizational

performance.

An example of a theory focused on improving employee motivation is Deci and

Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory (SDT). Similar to a researcher focus on

employee engagement through understanding daily job psychological factors by means of

the BEM, researchers using SDT concentrate on employee motivation through the

comprehension of social variables in an effort to guide toward desired behaviors. Deci

and Ryan explained that the SDT is motivational and focuses on the direction of behavior using motivational constructs to promote affective cognitive and behavioral variables. Researchers using SDT focus on how motivation affects human processes and is useful in a variety of fields such as education, work, parenting, and as a guide for interventions to improve human circumstances (Vallerand et al., 2008). To explain, Vallerand et al. (2008) posited that the effect of social factors, circumstantial or permanent, impact the motivation processes of other tasks. Meyer and Gagnè (2008) espoused that researchers using the SDT believe that the satisfying basic psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness can encourage engagement. Meyer and Gagnè also explained that the SDT endorses two overarching forms of motivation as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, with extrinsic motivation being dominant. Supporting the notion, Deci and Ryan (2008) defined extrinsic motivation as the behavior where the reason for doing an activity does not correspond with interest in the activity. Intrinsic motivation is the natural propensity to do an activity of interest and to exercise capabilities through the successful completion of challenges (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Additionally, Meyer and Gagnè (2008) indicated that extrinsic motivation can reflect desires to (a) gain rewards, (b) avoid punishment, (c) boost ego or avoid guilty feelings, (d) attain important personal goals, and (e) self-expression.

In criticism of the SDT theory regarding employee engagement, Vallerand et al. (2008) explained that the SDT is limited due to the overall focus on suboptimal forms of motivation, and does not consider that changes to a more self-determined form of motivation would lead to individuals experiencing more adaptive outcomes. However,

Levesque, Copeland, and Surcliffe (2008) stated that motivational changes take place overtime due to repeated exposure to experiences that make the individual feel self-determined. Levesque et al. also noted that the motivational process activates unconsciously, and explained the importance of examining whether SDT behaviors, some not considered automatic in the theory, could be automatically stimulated.

Rewards and Incentives

Productive employees use positive energy while completing work duties, which, in turn, constructively affects organizational performance metrics (Kahn, 1990). Using the concept that job engagement is the exchange of benefits with the organization, employees positively respond when they psychologically expect that high engagement result in an exchange for organizational rewards (Yin, N., 2018). Shields and Brown (2016) mentioned that the two types of rewards are extrinsic and intrinsic, with intrinsic rewards revolving around job-related rewards, such as job challenges, and extrinsic rewards as tangible, such as money. To explain, Shields and Brown also stated that extrinsic rewards separate into three main types (a) financial rewards such as pay and benefits, (b) developmental rewards such as training, and (c) social rewards such as a positive organizational climate. Extrinsic rewards, such as pay allowances, and intrinsic rewards from supervisors could increase employee engagement and productivity if offered positively (Khattak et al., 2017). Shields and Brown (2016) further expounded that rewards should (a) attract the right people for the right jobs, (b) retain the best people by rewarding their contributions to the organization, and (c) motivate employees to contribute productively. An organizational reward strategy to motivate employees would

focus on financial rewards, while developmental and social rewards are effective in enhancing organizational commitment (Shields & McLean, 2016).

Alternatively, if employees perceived their incentives as negative, rewards are found to have an adverse influence on employee behavior and can increase harmful behaviors (Victor & Hoole, 2017). Hoole and Hotz (2016) noted that engaged employees had a significantly higher view of rewards than unengaged employees. Additionally, N. Yin (2018) mentioned that employees feel their labor and effort is worthless if they psychologically expect their high productivity will result in a low organizational reward. Identifying the targeted needs of engagement is vital, as it is impossible to reward engagement without understanding the strategic goals of the organization, as well as the needs of the employee (Welbourne & Schramm, 2017).

Theories such as Herzbergs's (1959) two-factor theory (e.g. motivation-hygiene theory), Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory, and the BEM explained possible impacts of rewards in employee engagement strategies. Using Herzberg's (1959) two-factor theory, Alshmemri, Shahwan-Akl, and Maude (2017) explained that the premise of Herzberg's (1959) two-factor theory was the concept of two factors, motivation and hygiene, that influenced employee attitudes of satisfaction and dissatisfaction regarding their work. Hansen, Smith, and Hansen (2002) explicated that hygiene factors explained in the theory is the basis of an employee's motivation to obtain rewards, and directly related is the hygiene-motivator that is associated to the concepts and necessity of employee rewards. Moreover, Hur (2017) explained that factors related to the feeling of satisfaction are motivators, while factors associated to feelings of

dissatisfaction are hygiene factors. Alshmemri et al. (2017) expounded that the two factors that affected job satisfaction divide into two sets of categories that included (a) motivation factors associated with the need for growth and self-actualization and (b) hygiene factors that focused on the need to avoid unpleasantness. Alshmemri et al. (2017) further noted that motivation factors are the most correlated with job satisfaction and postulated that rewards are the result of recognition in the motivation factor. Additionally, Hyun and Oh (2011) posited that the role of hygiene factors is to prevent disgruntled workers. In seminal work, Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (1959/2011) stated that if an extraneous work reward is disconnected from actual job tasks, the employee would learn new skills that revolve around the reward. To promote a target behavior, a reward program must be qualitative and valued by employees (Hansen et al., 2002). Herzberg et al. (1959/2011) also argued that organizations should restructure jobs to increase the ability of employees to achieve meaningful work goals. Moreover, Hansen et al. (2002) continued by mentioning that organizational leaders can understand employee motivation by understanding motivating factors.

In criticism of Herzberg's (1959) two-factor theory regarding employee rewards, Hyun and Oh (2011) mentioned that it is ambiguous to whether motivators or hygiene factors correlate more with job satisfaction. Saad and Hasanein (2018) explained that motivator factors build high levels of positive performance in the workplace, but a lack of the factors does not produce high levels of dissatisfaction. According to Hyun and Oh (2011), there is a controversy about whether the predictive power of motivators is greater than hygiene factors. Hygiene factors relate to the conditions of the job and do not

directly relate to the job (Saad & Husanein, 2018). Hyun and Oh (2011) further explained

that even if motivators are more powerful than hygiene factors, it could not conclude that

all motivation factors classified as motivators are more associated with job satisfaction

than those factors classified as hygiene factors. Additionally, Hyun and Oh (2011)

posited that a reconsideration of the effects of motivators and hygiene factors should

occur with an emphasis of relative importance.

   Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs is an additional employee motivational

theory that can explicate the importance of rewards in an employee productivity strategy.

The basis of Maslows's (1942) hierarchy of needs is to understand and influence

employee motivation using five motivational needs ordered by importance as (a)

psychological, (b) safety, (c) social, (d) esteem (e) self-actualization (Fallatah & Syed,

2018). Maslow (1943) explained that in a society, people are motivated to fulfill their

esteem needs, which includes a high evaluation of themselves, approval and respect from

others, and feelings of adequacy and usefulness. In a later study focused on motivation

and personality, Maslow (1954) stated that a reward is a physiological pleasure since

pleasure is physiologically derived, and noted that an individual's perception and manner

that the reward is given can be as effective as the reward itself. Hansen et al. (2002)

asserted that extrinsic motivation drives the need for rewards and explained that an

organization needs a reward strategy that promotes specific behaviors.

   In criticism of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs concerning employee rewards,

Acevedo (2015) maintained that the Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory has not

been evaluated in the business field, and explained that the theory denies personality,

which could reduce organizational effectiveness. Acevedo continued by noting that in the theory, higher needs are consciously unsuggested until the lower needs are met and indicated that the theory considers humans in a reductionist view instead of individual personalities. In contrary to the theory, Winston (2016) explained that the emergence of needs does not appear in any particular order and are dependent of individual and environmental factors. Additionally, Winston mentioned that the dominance of need, and not its general presence, basis the pattern. Acevedo (2015) suggested that Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory view employees as individuals in pursuit of satisfaction instead of independent people with varying needs of satisfaction. Winston (2016) further espoused that gratification needs, such as work engagement and love, satisfy higher-level needs that differ per person and culture.

Using Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory, researchers identify valance as the basic requirement for rewards to be influential (Malik, Butt, & Choi, 2015). Lloyd and Mertens (2018) stated that the basis of the expectancy theory is that individuals have choices and will make decisions that they feel will lead to the best outcome. Malik et al. (2015) noted that the effectiveness of rewards is critical for motivating employees and promoting organizational goals. In a quantitative study focused on understanding job behavior using the expectancy theory, Lawler and Suttle (1973) argued that rewards relate to performance, with employee motivation reflected in their performance. Lawler and Suttle also posited that expectations of receiving intrinsic rewards had a strong correlation to performance.

In criticism of Vroom's expectancy theory regarding rewards, Mansaray (2019) postulated that motivation is only likely to develop if a clear and usable relationship exists between performance and outcome, with the outcome in support of satisfying needs. Fudge and Schlacter (1999) indicated that Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory did not initially consider ability, training, and experience, and added those factors in later adaptations due to their importance in understanding job behaviors. Fudge and Schlacter also maintained that an employee must possess the skills necessary to complete a task, with higher competency increasing the expectancy of rewards. Isaac, Zerbe, and Pitt (2001) stated that any weaknesses in the value attached to the outcome would significantly affect the person's motivational state. Moreso, Liao, Liu, and Pi (2011) explained that behavioral intentions are the primary factor of a person's subsequent behavior. Mansaray (2019) also noted that management-imposed changes in job or working conditions, not tied to performance, could reduce motivation.

An employee's motivation in receiving rewards can also tie back to the use of the BEM, which boats a research focus on employee motivation and engagement through the understanding of psychological factors such as reward incentives. Researchers implementing the BEM use six behavioral conditions to promote performance that includes (a) data, (b) instruments, (c) incentives, (d) knowledge, (e) capacity, and (f) motives (Ross & Stefaniak, 2018). Binder (1996) explained that the incentives behavioral condition includes both incentives and consequences to promote improvement in employee productivity. Additionally, Ross and Stefaniak (2018) argued that for the

incentives condition, an organization must have motivating incentives available for

employees.

Perceived Supervisor Support

Khattak et al. (2017) described supervisor support as the employee's perception of

how leaders care about their contributions and welfare. Thus, perceived supervisor

support (PSS) helps fulfill socio-emotional needs, such as esteem and organizational

affiliation, which contributes to increased wellbeing and morale (Jin & McDonald, 2016).

A leader is instrumental in employee engagement as a workplace climate, and

relationships are primarily shaped through social aspects such as colleagues and

supervisors (Krishnaveni & Monica, 2016). Jin and McDonald (2016) noted that a

managers' demonstration of care and concern could create a greater level of work

engagement. Employees that feel supported by their supervisor are more committed to

their employer, and are higher performing than their counterparts (Frear, Donsbach,

Theilgard, Shanock, 2018). Rantesalu, Mus and Arfin (2017) espoused that employees

would always want appreciation of work results and expect a fair wage. When employees

perceive that their managers value their contributions and care about their well-being,

they value the support, which increases their commitment to the company (Stinglhamber,

Caesens, Clark, & Eisenberger, 2016). Jin and McDonald (2016) also stated that

managers should have confidence in the effects of building quality relationships with

their employees, and to consider responses of employee surveys and other individualized

methods. In their study about factors that affect employee performance, Diamantidis and

Chatzoglou (2019) discovered that a strong relationship with managers directly affected

employee performance. Congruently, Saratun (2016) detailed that managers who actively engage in open dialog, encourage the development of new skills, and protect employee interests, can increase employee productivity through a strong PSS relationship of mutual trust. Employees that feel supported by the organization are more willing to support positive organizational goals than employees with less PSS (Jaroensutiyotin, Wang, Ling, & Chen (2019).

Employees with high PSS feel that the organization values their work and that they are optimally using resources (Rai et al., 2017). However, managers should recognize the links between social support resources and employee advocacy behaviors (Tsarenko, Leo, & Tse, 2018). Jin and McDonald (2016) noted an increased level of engagement when employees feel that their managers recognized their contribution and seem genuinely interested in their success. In their study, Jin and McDonald confirmed a link between positive PSS, rewards, and engagement. Contrastingly, poor PSS methods contribute to high employee turnover, affecting profits due to the high cost of training new employees (Malek, Kline, & DiPietro, 2018). In their study, Gordon, Tang, Day, and Adler (2019) found how low subjective well-being (SWB), employee happiness in their organization, and PSS could increase an employee's intent to leave. To explain, Gordon et al. mentioned that in addition to PSS, high employee's SWB levels reduced turnover since employees felt supported by their managers and organization.

An optional theory for determining the effect of PSS is the organizational support theory (OST). The foundation of the OST involves the degree of which employees feel that the organizational leaders care about their work contributions and well-being (Baran,

Shanock, & Miller, 2012). Kurtessis et al. (2017) stated that the OST has the potential to view employee organization relationship from (a) the employee's viewpoint, (b) the perceived organizational support (POS) construct, and (c) the strong associations of POS to organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison and Sowa (1986) defined as an employee perception regarding the extent the organization values their contributions, and cares about their welfare. Kurtessis et al. (2017) also postulated that POS is assumed to fulfill socioemotional needs, such as approval, esteem, and emotional support, that leads to identification with the organization. POS develops based on the employees' perception of (a) favorable job conditions, (b) rewards, (c) personally relevant organizational policies, (d) experience of fair treatment, and (e) interactions with representatives of the organization (Stinglhamber, et al, 2016). Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) posited that a feature of OST is that it offers clear and testable predictions regarding outcomes of POS.

According to Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002), employees view positive or negative treatment as a sign that the organization favors or disfavors them. Kurtessis et al. (2017) noted that employees with high POS should increase their job-related efforts, which result in enhanced performance. More so, Stinglhamber et al. (2016) explained that POS enhances (a) an employee's well-being, (b) increases positive orientation to the organization, and (c) beneficial behaviors directed at the organization. In a quantitative study about POS, Kurtessis et al. (2017) found a strong correlation of PSS to POS. According to Jin and McDonald (2016), employees with high PSS are likely to perceive greater POS, which increases engagement in the workplace. Additionally, Kurtessis et al.,

(2017) explicated that the perception of organizational support influences an employee's emotional attachment. Jin and McDonald also stated that conveyed employee evaluations by a manager to executive management increases the association of PSS and POS via the manager.

Organizational Climate

Rantesalu, Mus and Arfin (2017) explained that organizational culture is the essence of what activities are important in the organization and maintained that organizational culture is a guideline used to determine appropriate and inappropriate actions in the organization. Pinder (2008) mentioned that a strong organizational culture relates to the degree of consistency among an employee's structured beliefs, values, and life assumptions. More so, Patterson and Warr (2004) noted that measuring organizational climate might offer estimates of operational performance since researchers strive to understand employee perceptions of organizational processes, and suggested four performance measurements including (a) economic, (b) technological, (c) commercial, and (d) social. To explain, Patterson and Warr defined economic measurement as productivity and probability measurement, technological measurement as new product development, commercial measurement as market share or specific niche, and social measurement as the effects to suppliers and the public. Rantesalu et al. (2017) also postulated that organizational culture highly affects organizational commitment and employee performance. Likewise, Saratun (2016) remarked that when employees experience psychological safety through engagement initiatives, such as voicing improvement suggestions or project ideas, they are more willing to invest themselves in

their job roles. To expand, Kurtessis et al. (2017) stated that favorable treatment by others in the organization could improve employee view of the organization.

Rantesalu et al. (2017) advocated that an improperly implemented organizational culture could become the reason there is a lack of commitment and low employee performance. Additionally, Fusch and Gillespie (2012) explained that when improving workplace culture, organizational leaders experience two main challenges, including what to do after a successful initiative, and how to maintain the implemented initiatives. A focus on measuring employee perceptions about organizational culture may help leaders understand the processes required to resolve productivity issues and increase employee production output. To improve organizational culture, Casey and Sieber (2016) indicated that incremental changes to increase corporate social responsibility, sustainability, and employee engagement techniques, could decrease problematic situations.

A theory that could gauge employee satisfaction and motivation in an organizational culture is Alderfer's (1969) existence, relatedness, and growth (ERG) theory of motivation. Mansray (2019) stated that Alderfer's (1969) creation of the ERG theory was to overcome the difficulties found in the Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory. Rantesalu, Mus and Arfin (2017) explained that ERG theory elements encompass the demands of needs such as substance, physical, family, social, employment, productivity, and creativity. In addition, Steidle and Gockel (2013) noted that the classification of needs in the ERG theory also includes the needs regarding safe and acceptable working conditions. Rantesalu et al. (2017) also maintained that researchers

following the ERG theory group human needs in three categories (a) existence, (b) relatedness, and (c) growth, and posited that each employee must meet those needs to be motivated. Likewise, Mansray (2019) mentioned that the name of the theory is an acronym, using the first letter in each category. Schneider and Alderfer (1973) also expounded that existence needs includes physiological and material desires, which includes work related pay and fringe benefits. Relatedness needs consist of the desire to have meaningful relationships with others such that there is mutual comfort to share thoughts and feelings (Schneider & Alderfer, 1973). More so, Schneider and Alderfer (1973) stated that growth needs include desires of having creative and productive effects on their environment. Additionally, Steidle and Gockel (2013) explained that the three ERG factors align with work aspects including (a) job security, (b) social benefits, (c) relationship with colleagues, (d) relationship with supervisor, (e) work climate, (f) promotion opportunities, and (g) development and training opportunities.

In criticism of Alderfer's (1969) ERG theory regarding organizational culture, Arnolds and Boshoff (2002) noted that the ERG theory just shows the correlation between needs and behaviors and does not explain what needs cause certain behaviors. Alderfer (1977) indicated that the ERG theory is not about job attitudes as it is about describing subjective experiences regarding desires. Alderfer also explained that the ERG theory does not consider rationality and is only concerned with subjective experiences of individuals in their environment. More so, Khan, Khan, Nawaz, and Qureshi (2010) posited that theories such as the ERG theory attempt to have a global view of an employee's reality, such as work environment characteristics, but are commonly culture

specific. Khan et al. (2010) continued by stating that needs have different meanings and prioritization in each culture.

An additional theory that can be used to measure employee performance in an organizational culture is McClelland's (1961) human motivation theory. Pinder (2008) posited that McClelland's (1961) human motivation theory is founded on the belief that all motives are learned from experiences, and that certain environmental cues are paired with positive or negative consequences. To expand, Pinder (2008) explained that researchers using McCelland's (1961) human motivation theory believe that there is a focused connection between particular needs and emotions. Additionally, Fisher (2009) posited that researchers using McClelland's (1961) human motivation theory perceive that people are motivated by three types of needs (a) power, (b) affiliation, and (c) achievement.

Erciyes (2019) noted that McClelland's (1961) human motivation theory is a motivational model attempting to explain how achievement, power, and affiliation needs affect people's actions. Fisher (2009) argued that workers are usually strongly motivated by one of the three types of needs. Erciyes (2019) also stated that McClelland (1961) measured the need for achievement among managers from multiple countries and under various contexts and classified the levels of need as high and low. Furthermore, Fisher (2009) posited that it is important for managers to understand what type of need motivates their employees and offer the employees opportunities to satisfy those needs. The need for achievement is learned when the opportunities to compete with standards of excellence are associated with positive outcomes (Pinder, 2008). Fisher (2009) also

explained that employees motivated by the power-affiliated needs would perform their best when given opportunities to control and influence others. Employees that are motivated by affiliation needs work best when they feel accepted and can avoid rejection (Fisher, 2009). Additionally, Fisher (2009) indicated that employees motivated by achievement needs would best perform when there is a possibility of success without the risk of failure.

The importance of measuring the organizational culture for employee performance can tie back to the BEM. Ross and Stefaniak mentioned three components that separate the environmental support element in the BEM as (a) data that focuses on expectations and feedback, (b) instruments that are needed resources to complete the job, and (c) incentives that includes performance related consequences and incentives. Likewise, Crossman (2010) maintained that the BEM can connect performance with financial results and posited that exemplary business performance is set in the environmental and behavioral components of the model. Diamantidis and Chatzoglou (2019) explained that the work environment could influence employee attitudes and commitment. Crossman (2010) also stated that researchers could associate performance with business outcomes. An analysis of the environment support element can determine whether resources provided are adequate to complete the job and could help leaders provide necessary feedback to correct gaps (Ross and Stefaniak, 2018).

Transition

Section 1 of this employee productivity research project included the problem statement, purpose statement, and nature of the study to defend the reason for choosing a

qualitative methodology and a single case study design. Additionally, Section 1 contained the overarching research question with aligned interview questions and details about Gilbert's 1978 BEM conceptual framework used in the study. Section 1 also incorporated assumptions, limitations, and delimitations encountered during research with a thorough review of professional and academic literature. A literature review containing peer-reviewed and seminal works of current and historical research relating to employee productivity factors will conclude Section 1.

In Section 2, I restate the purpose statement and introduced the key features of the research plan. This section includes an explanation regarding my choice of a qualitative methodology and a single case study design. Discussion of the researcher role, reasoning for the selection of study participants, and explanation of the population sampling are also included in this section. Section 2 ends with my plan for thorough data analysis and an explanation of data validity and reliability in qualitative studies.

Section 3 contains a presentation of the study findings, professional applications of the results, and implications for social changes. For completion of Section 3, I offer recommendations for current actions, ideas for further research, a reflection of the study, and a concluding statement.

Section 2: The Project

The goal of this study was to explore strategies that technology consulting small business leaders use to improve employee productivity. In Section 2, I discussed the study purpose and my role as the researcher. Additionally, I detailed the study participants and thoroughly justified my choice to utilize a qualitative research method and a single case study design for this study. To conclude, I comprehensively analyzed my data collection efforts, organization techniques, and explained the reliability and validity of the study's data.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies technology consulting small business leaders use to increase employee productivity. The targeted population consisted of all of the leaders working at a small technology consulting business in south Texas, who have developed and deployed successful strategies to improve employee productivity. The implications for positive social change include the potential to assist technology consulting small businesses leaders' understanding of effective strategies to improve employee productivity, which could lead to increased profits, business growth, and new employment opportunities in surrounding communities.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative studies, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and validation (Clark, & Vealé, 2018). This study involved collecting experiences of successful employee productivity strategies from a leadership perceptive. I served as the

primary research instrument and were responsible for participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Fusch, Fusch, and Ness (2018) stated one of the most difficult dilemmas for a qualitative researcher is understanding the viewpoints of others.

My personal perspective, also known conceptually as my personal lens, unintentionally biased my data collection and analysis. Peterson (2019) mentioned that a researcher's reactiveness to participant narratives based on resemblances of personal experiences could affect interactions, responses to additional queries, and data analysis. Moreover, the worldviews and experiences of the participants will inadvertently cause data biases in their interview responses. Fusch et al. (2018) explained that researchers conducting qualitative studies bring and share their biases within the study and to participants. Consequently, researchers strive to reduce their personal biases to ensure they understand and are correctly interpreting the participant's responses (Fusch et al., 2018). To limit bias, I used methods such as implementing interview procedures, reflective journaling, and member checking.

Further data collection sources for this study included data artifacts such as business documentation and records indicating increased profits. The use of multiple data sources can increase study validity and reduce researcher biases (Denzin, 1978). Multiple methods of data collection will strengthen the legitimacy of the data collected for the study and ensure data saturation and data triangulation. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) defined triangulation as the use of multiple research methods in a study and explained that triangulation reflects a researcher's attempt to understand the questioned

phenomenon. In a seminal study on research validation, Campbell and Fiske (1959) noted the importance of discriminant and convergent validation to justify study measures and reduce the risks of researcher bias. Campbell and Fiske (1959) recommended the use of more than one trait and method, termed a multitrait-multimethod matrix, to increase measurement correlation and issues with conceptual developments of the study.

To reduce bias in my role as the researcher, I did not conduct this study in my place of employment or interact with the leadership team before the interviews. Moreover, to identify personal assumptions and biases, my knowledge of technology does not extend to consulting; however, I do have a basic understanding of modern employee productivity practices in a technology-based organization through my position as an information technology department employee. All ethical codes and standards apply to communication with the technology consulting small business leaders, including any email, phone, and in-person contact. To uphold the validity of my study, I confirmed participant privacy through careful safeguarding of my notes and audio recordings. Additionally, I assigned codes and pseudonyms to reference participants and categorize responses.

Ethical codes, such as the American Sociological Association (ASA), published in 1970, provide standards for research, including human subject protection and professional conduct guidelines (Cragoe, 2019). Mertens (2018) mentioned that ethical standards are guided by procedures from professional associations, organizational policies, and government-sanctioned viewpoints, with the Belmont Report (1979) mandated by many research-funding agencies. To ensure the ethical treatment of

participants in the study, I followed the guidelines recommended by the Belmont Report (1979).

Participants

Selecting appropriate participants is critical to a study as each respondent can offer distinct perceptions to a study. A researcher's choice of study participants is established by how the researcher views the impact of the research topic, core issues, and what they aim to learn from the identified participants (Peshkin, 2001). Reybold, Lammert, and Stribling (2013) explained that a researcher bases their participant selection choices on their tangible and intangible realities that can include available resources, physical access, rapport, and historical timing. Additionally, in a short timeframe, a researcher must introduce themselves and establish a trusting relationship with their participants (Pitts & Miller-Day, 2007).

Participant Eligibility

Determining participant eligibility criteria requires a researcher to identify and establish inclusion and exclusion criteria before selecting participants (Killawi et al., 2014). It is critical for a researcher to set limits or bounds to a study as the selected participants influence the strength of the study (Emerson, 2015; Yin, R., 2018). Participant criteria set by the researcher are attributes that the participant must have to be eligible for study participation (Robinson, 2014).

The criteria for the participants in this study included (a) the participant is a business leader in the technology consulting small business that is the focus of the single case study, (b) the participant has implemented successful employee productivity

strategies in the technology consulting small business, and (c) the participant can efficiently explain methods and approaches used when implementing employee productivity strategies in the small business. In a qualitative study, recruiting participants with experience in the focused research topic or phenomena is necessary and purposeful as the selected participants are those who can offer the best insights to increase understanding of a phenomenon (Sargeant, 2012; Yin, 2016). I ensured that participants met the criteria and eligibility to participate in this study.

Gaining Access to Participants

To gain access to the leaders in the technology consulting small business, I contacted the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) via phone and email and scheduled a time to discuss and answer questions regarding the employee productivity study. In initial dialogues to representatives from a potential collaborating organization, the researcher should explain their reasons for the choice of their organization as the fieldwork site, the type of work to expect, the possibility of any disturbances, and reporting procedures of the completed study (Shenton & Hayter 2004). I asked the CEO questions to learn background information of the organization, such as the organizational culture and job duties of each leadership position.

Shenton and Hayter (2004) stated that gaining access is a pressing concern for qualitative researchers since successful access to the organization is a critical factor that can halt research progress. I introduced myself to the participants via a company tour with the CEO. In the initial meeting, I answered questions regarding the study. Preliminary meetings with the participants can enable the researcher to articulate the

importance of each participant's contribution and explain the value of the study (Shenton & Hayter). Before initial calls to schedule interviews with the technology consulting small business leaders, I requested an organizational roster with the list of leadership contact details, such as emails and phone numbers, to schedule convenient times to meet for in-person interviews.

Establishing a Working Relationship

To establish a positive rapport and gain the trust of the participants, I conveyed the purpose, data collection strategies, interview protocol, and information security protocols of the study through email correspondence, and again before the interview. Cronin (2014) stated that a researcher could build cohesive relationships with participants when there is mutual knowledge of the study context. I meticulously explained my processes of ensuring participant confidentiality via methods including data encryption, and coded participant identifiers. Yin (2016) noted the importance of transparency when completing a qualitative study and explained that researchers must descriptively document research processes to increase the readability of the study.

When scheduling interviews, I invited each participant separately to meet for lunch or coffee at a location of their choice for a relaxed, conversational interview. Elwood and Martin (2000) mentioned that participants might offer different types of responses based on the interview location and stressed the importance of informing participants of the interview context so they can choose a comfortable place to discuss the topic. Conducting interviews at a location outside of the office building could provide researchers an opportunity to make detailed observations that may generally go unnoticed

(Elwood & Martin, 2000). Throughout all stages of the interview process, I reminded each participant that their involvement in the study is optional, and that they may contact me with any questions or concerns.

Research Method and Design

Qualitative research methods include the process of systematically collecting, organizing, and interpreting information derived from text, participant observations, or participant interviews to understand phenomena through an individual's perspective (Malterud, 2001). A researcher's choice of the method used for the study can determine the type of data received. Malterud (2001) explained that different researchers might access diverse, and equally valid, representations of the same studied phenomena as the results are dependent on the stance and chosen perspective.

Research Method

Three main types of research methods include qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Almalki, 2016). The key to comprehensive research is attention to the strengths and weaknesses of the different methodological approaches in relation to the standards of the study (Coppedge, 2012). Each method enables the researcher to view a phenomenon from different lenses. Coppedge (2012) explained that the choice of the research method for a study could affect the data and conclusion of the study.

To explain the potential uses of qualitative methods in a study, Hammarberg, Kirkman, and deLacey (2016) remarked that qualitative methods are ideal for use in studies aiming to understand experiences, perspectives, and meanings from the participant's standpoint. The qualitative method boasts exploratory research techniques

that enable the researcher to delve into an event to gather thoughts, opinions, and likely

trends of a phenomenon. A distinctive characteristic of the qualitative research method is

the focus on theory development instead of assumed logical deductions (Peterson, 2019).

To expand on the uses of qualitative methods, Hammarberg et al. (2016) stated that

qualitative methods include techniques such as small group discussions to examine

common behaviors, semistructured interviews for background perspectives, and analysis

of documents such as reports, diaries, and websites for awareness of private or distributed

information.

To build rapport and actively engage participants, qualitative researchers use

techniques such as open-ended questions to acquire participant data (Merriam & Grenier,

2019). The leaders in the technology consulting small business will have differing

perspectives of effective employee productivity strategies. Qualitative research is a

suitable method to understand specific values, behaviors, and opinions of involved

populations (King, Horrocks, & Brooks, 2018). More so, qualitative methods allow for a

flexible style of data categorization and feature the ability to describe study variations,

explain relationships, and portray individual experiences (Yin, 2017). In this study I

explored employee productivity strategies from a leader's perspective, so the use of open-

ended questions via a qualitative method, is the best choice to obtain descriptive data.

To explain the use of the quantitative method, Hammarberg et al. (2016)

expounded that the ideal use of the quantitative method in a study is to answer research

questions that require (a) factual data, (b) when the question is known and definite, and

(c) when variables are isolated. Quantitative researchers use designs such as correlational,

experimental, quasi-experimental, and descriptive to generalize results in their study

(Potit & Beck, 2010; Swanson & Holton, 2005). Researchers using quantitative

numerical data can transform the data into displays useful to the study (Bansal, Smith &

Vaara, 2018). Blaikie and Priest (2019) stated that researchers conducting a quantitative

study commonly use self-administered questionnaires and structured interviews to collect

data. I did not use a quantitative method since the study did not require hypothesis testing

or the use of close-ended questions.

Researchers using a mixed method approach for their study combine elements of

qualitative and quantitative approaches to increase their understanding of the phenomena

(Johnson, Onwueegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). Johnson and Christensen (2014) explained

that mixed methods research approach is a useful strategy to use if the researcher wants

to find information such as testing previously constructed theories, testing previously

constructed hypotheses, quantitative predictions, and for results independent of the

researcher. I did not use a mixed method approach since the use of quantitative

techniques does not apply to this study.

Research Design

For this study on small business employee productivity, I considered four research

designs including (a) case study, (b) narrative, (c) ethnography, and (d) phenomenology.

The use of a case study design involves the investigation of real-life cases to capture

complexity and details (Yin, R., 2018). Stake (1995) defined case study research as the

process of studying the complexity and details of a single phenomenon with the intention

of understanding the activity within important event circumstances. Case study

researchers must generate detailed insights for a greater understanding of complex processes (Harrison et al., 2017). To expand on techniques that are used to develop an in-depth understanding, Creswell and Poth (2018) expounded that researchers must collect and integrate multiple forms of qualitative data that can range from interviews to audiovisual data. I selected a case study design for this study as I investigated strategies that technology consulting small business leaders use to improve employee productivity.

Researchers using a narrative design aim to receive details of personal experiences, relationships, and life events from their participants (King et al., 2018; McAdams, 1993). Creswell and Poth (2018) defined narrative research as a process used by researchers to understand participant lived experiences and conveyed stories. Researchers using a narrative method can explore individual experiences within narratives such as social, cultural, intuitional, familial, and linguistic stories (Clandinin, 2013). Additionally, narrative researchers can collect a participant's lived experiences through different forms of methods such as interviews, group conversation, documents, and observation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I did not choose a narrative research design as the intent of this study was to explore employee productivity strategies and did not require shared stories from the participants.

Ethnographic researchers are interested in discovering and holistically describing cultures through a member's perspective (Johnson et al., 2014). Cresswell and Poth (2018) noted that an ethnography research design would be ideal to use if the researcher intended to study the internal workings of a social group for information such as beliefs, language, and behaviors. I did not choose an ethnographic research design for this study

as the goal was to review employee productivity strategies and not workplace ethos. Johnson et al. (2014) defined phenomenological research as a qualitative technique used by researchers to understand how an individual or group experience phenomena.

To explain phenomenological research, Moustakas (1994) stated that phenomenologists focus on describing experiences and intuitively seeking meaning through examining phenomenon from multiple perspectives. Phenomenologists disregard anything outside of the study to concentrate on specific aspects and interpret the intended meanings of the studied phenomenon (Groenwald, 2004; Holloway, 1997). Welman and Kruger (1999) explained that phenomenologists aim to understand social and psychological perspectives from those involved in phenomena. I did not choose a phenomenological research design as I focused on employee productivity strategies rather than the connotations of lived experiences.

Data Saturation

To reach data saturation a researcher must be unable to find additional new data and themes for the study (Denzin, 2009). Researchers conducting case study methods can control their study scope to ensure data saturation, with the requirement of using a minimum of two data methods to triangulate the data (Denzin, 2009). Fusch and Ness (2015) offered expanded examples of data collection techniques to ensure researchers obtain data saturation in their case study and included processes such as interviews and focus group sessions.

Population and Sampling

Population and sampling techniques can affect the study data collection process and techniques, including the target population and ideal sample group. Martinez-Mesa, Gonzalez-Chica, Duquia, Bonamigo, and Bastos (2016) noted the value of deciding population and sampling techniques early in the planning stage of the study and stressed the importance of the researcher ensuring that their sampling framework corresponds with the objectives and strategies of the study for appropriate data saturation.

Population

To obtain in-depth analysis and insightful feedback, the population for this study consisted of leaders employed in a single technology consulting small business in Texas. I selected the participants through census, as the chosen participants included all of the leaders employed in one technology consulting small business who have developed and deployed successful strategies to improve employee productivity in their organization. The leaders I studied in the chosen technology consulting small business met my participant criteria as they have solved the business problem of increasing employee productivity in their organization and can share strategies that proved successful when implemented in their small business.

Sampling

Martinez-Mesa et al. (2016) stated that sampling is defined as a subset of participants from a target population and explained that the chosen population for a sample has similar characteristics to the target population. King et al. (2018) stressed the importance of choosing a sample population that statistically represents the population to

be studied. An ideal participant sampling size is large enough to address the research questions and small enough to extract useful employee productivity data. Qualitative sampling methods include sampling techniques such as convenience sampling, which involves the selection of accessible participants, theoretical sampling that entails the researcher developing a theory and choosing certain participants to examine the theory, and purposeful sampling which the researcher selects the most productive sample to answer the research question (Marshall, 1996).

For this study, I used a census method of sampling, as it is reasonable to include all leadership in the technology consulting small business. Martinez-Mesa et al. (2016) noted that census-based sampling for target populations is preferred when possible. Likewise, Daniel (2011) stated that a census sample is a favorable choice in situations such as the necessity for complete enumeration, the inclusion of small categories of the study populations, and the importance of attaining dependable results. Trotter (2012) explained that the census sample approach accepts a comprehensive range of population sizes for use in a qualitative study to include special populations relevant to the study. The proposed use of a census sampling method adequately ensured data saturation for this employee productivity study.

Ethical Research

Adhering to ethical principle throughout the research process is an essential success element for researchers. Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi, and Cheraghi (2014) noted that researchers face ethical challenges in all stages of the study and explained that challenges could include confidentiality issues, problems with informed

consent, and potential impact on participants that can void results. Correspondingly, Tracy (2019) stated that ethical research includes the consideration of rules, regulations, and the participants' needs. I ensured that the findings of this study are ethical by reporting any unexpected events that had an impact on data collection or analysis in my study. Reporting issues can ensure all research results are within compliance, and that the results are accurate and reliable. To help maintain ethical standards, Aguinis and Solarino (2019) stated that researchers should report any unexpected events that could affect data accessibility and explained the importance of reporting any impact on data collection or analysis. Agreeing, Tracy (2019) explained that ethical researchers attentively consider the impact of their practices throughout the study.

I conducted this study under the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval number 12-12-19-0751679. Cragoe (2019) explained that to receive IRB approval the researcher must provide documentation regarding aspects of the study including the purpose of the study, participant informed consent, and the risks and benefits to the subjects or communities. The participant consent form merits special attention as participants must be able to read and understand the benefits and risks of their participation (Balon et al., 2019). Homan (1991) described four elements of informed consent as (a) telling potential participants all relevant aspects of what to expect as a study participant, (b) participant understanding of the information, (c) participant competence and (d) that study involvement is voluntary. To participate in the data collection phase of the study all participants must give written consent, via the signing of the consent form, of their understanding of their position in the study. I followed the

advice of the Belmont Report Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research (1979) committee about not harming participants.

To code participant data, I used pseudonyms to safeguard my participant's identities. Petrova, Dewing, and Camilleri (2016) explained that confidentiality strategies begin with the researcher's awareness of the importance of confidentiality, with confidentiality values needed from the researcher as autonomy, privacy, and commitment. In order to guarantee confidentiality, a researcher must consider the needs of their participants and adhere to ethical principles, such as obtaining informed consent (Petrova et al., 2016). A protected online document service, and a password-protected computer external hard drive kept in a locked area that only I can access, securely stored all data for data safety and confidentiality purposes. I will retain all data relating to the project for 5 years. The Department of Health and Human Services (2016) mandated that researchers retain data relating to the study for a minimum of 3 years. After 5 years, I will destroy the data according to Walden University policy.

Investigators must plan for the possibility of participant withdrawals and include information regarding participant withdrawals in the participant consent form, along with general data handling procedures (Office of Human Research Protections, 2016). Procedures for withdrawing from the study included an oral or written notice of their decision to withdraw from the study. Should a participant elect to withdraw from the study, I gave them their interview notes to destroy. The withdrawing participant may personally erase their digitally recorded information from my files.

Data Collection Instruments

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary data collection instrument (Pezalla, Pettigrew, & Miller-Day, 2012). As the main data collection instrument for this study, I collected appropriate data via the use of (a) in-person semistructured interviews with member checking follow-up interviews using open-ended inquiry techniques, (b) direct observation, (c) reflective journaling, and (d) business documents.

To gain knowledge of successful employee strategies, I conducted in-person semistructured interviews using open-ended inquiry techniques and member checking follow-up interviews. I scheduled 90-minute interviews at locations of their choice. DeJonckeere and Vaughn (2019) defined semistructured interviews as protocol guided dialogue between a researcher and participant that is supplemented by probing follow-up questions. Marshall and Rossman (2016) termed member checking as a procedure used by researchers to share data and interpretations of interview responses with the participants to ensure validity. To expand, Marshall and Rossman noted that researchers using member checking invites the participants to confirm the study's findings and correct the researcher's interpretation of their interview responses.

I used direct observation to watch and note the participant's behavior by scheduling time from 9 a.m. – 11 a.m. one day a week for one month to observe their employee interactions. To gain access for direct observation, I emailed the CEO or my point of contact to schedule convenient days to conduct my observations. Bernard (2018) defined direct observation as watching and recording a person's behavior in my field notes.

Additionally, I used reflective journaling (e.g. reflexive journaling) to keep track of my thoughts throughout the study. I wrote in the journal in all stages of the project to reduce bias and demystify my research process to those that read my study Ortlipp (2008) defined reflective journaling as the opportunity for researchers to recall experiences that can contextualize aspects of research encounters. Using the contents of a reflective journal, a researcher can provide an inside view and make connections between theory and practice (Watts, 2007).

Furthermore, I explored business documents such as performance reports or balance sheets. I emailed the CEO or my point of contact to provide documents such as performance records or balance sheets. Merriam and Grenier (2019) mentioned that digital and document forms of business documents could include files such as public records, webpages, and papers; however, business documents can also be oral, visual, or contain cultural data. Using multiple collection methods helped me validate my data through data triangulation and data saturation.

Data Collection Technique

To explore what strategies technology consulting small business leaders use to increase employee productivity, I conducted (a) in-person semistructured interviews with member checking follow-up interviews using open-ended inquiry techniques, (b) direct observation, (c) reflective journaling, and (d) business documents.

Since I planned to meet the participant for lunch or coffee, I anticipated the length of each interview to last 60 minutes and scheduled 90-minute interview timeslots with the participant to prepare for any possible issues that could interrupt the interview process.

Depending on the length of time participants are willing to allocate for the interview, it was ideal to schedule interviews with added allotted time for eventualities such as interruptions or meeting delays (Rowley, 2012). Alshengeeti (2014) explained that advantages of semistructured interviewing include fewer incomplete answers, a controlled answering order, and a high return rate, while disadvantages include the potential for subconscious bias, and the possibility of inconsistent responses. Furthermore, Jacob and Furgerson (2012) recommend that researchers ensure their interview questions are open-ended and to use a recording device such as a voice recorder. I used a voice recorder to confirm I received all the verbal information for transcription purposes and to help myself focus on the participant responses of the research questions or inquiry probes without worrying about writing responses and notes down verbatim.

During my interviews, I used my interview protocol (see Appendix A) to ensure that I relay important information to participants and ask questions to receive the information I need for the study. My interview protocol contained a list of my interview questions and scripts to introduce the interview, wrap up an interview, and schedule follow-up interviews for member checking. The interview protocol also had a place where I wrote down a synthesis of my interpretation of the participant's responses for each interview question. Jacob and Furgerson (2012) noted that an interview protocol extends past the list of interview questions to the procedural level of the interview and includes scripts of what to say before the interview, at the conclusion of an interview.

Additionally, I made note of any key concepts and ideas present in the interview. I ensured appropriate member checking through follow-up interviews with the participants via the delivery of succinctly interpreted responses from the data that participants provided during the interview. Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, and Walter (2016) mentioned that member checking interviews allow researchers to focus on the confirmation, modification, and feedback from the participant through the review of a summary of their interview responses. Furthermore, I directly observed (see Appendix B) the participants and their interactions with their employees from 9 a.m. – 12 a.m. one time a week lasting a month. Wildemuth (2016) stated that researchers using observation methods gather rapport that could help gather precise data, such as the ability to closely see normal behaviors.

I used the reflective journaling technique to keep track of any ideas, experiences or personal biases throughout the study. I wrote in the journal in each stage of the study with a pen and notebook and separate written entries by date and location. Researchers using reflective journaling can create transparency in the research process and note the impact of their critical self-reflection (Ortlipp, 2008).

To obtain organizational documents for use in the study, I emailed my point of contact or the CEO for records such as performance reports or balance sheets, to show profits after implementing their employee productivity strategies. I asked for reports before and after the implementation of the employee productivity strategies, and I used the reports to analyze the company performance related to employee productivity in the organization. For public records, I conducted a web search to the organization's website

and the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to find additional information for use in the study. Bowen (2009) noted that some advantages of researchers using business documents for a document analysis are the efficient method, availability, cost-effectiveness, lack of obtrusiveness, and exactness. Bowen listed disadvantages as biased selectivity, low retrievability, and the potential of insufficient detail.

Data Organization Technique

I organized all study data from the interviews, interview notes, direct observation, and member checking using the qualitative analysis software platform, ATLAS.ti, To prepare the data for analysis, I used the ATLAS.ti software to separate the data into concepts and ideas, and then refine the data by separating it further into reoccurring concepts and ideas.

For data storage, I used an online document service, along with an external secure digital (SD) drive as a backup storage option, to store all scanned and uploaded data from the in-person semistructured interviews with member checking follow-up interviews using open-ended inquiry techniques, transcriptions, interview protocol, business documents, interview notes, and direct observations. I scanned paper data and added all files to an encrypted external SD drive. The external SD drive and paper copies are stored in a locked safe only accessible by me. Given (2008) stated that digital and non-digital aspects of data collected for research must be kept safe through appropriate data storage and security solutions, such as ensuring backups for digital data, to consider the data as formally archived. Researchers must maintain records required by the policy for a minimum of 3 years and research records relating to the conducted research for at

least 3 years after research completion (Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). I plan to maintain records for 5 years per Walden University policy.

Data Analysis

Methodological triangulation involves using more than one data collection method to obtain study data and is beneficial in confirming research findings, obtaining more comprehensive data, increasing data validity and understanding of the phenomenon (Bekhet & Zausniewski, 2012; Murray, 1999). I used the within-method of methodological triangulation since this is a qualitative case study. Bekhet and Zauszniewski (2012) noted that researchers using a within-method methodological triangulation method could use two or more methods in either a qualitative or quantitative data collection procedure.

Using a constant comparison analysis, I used all the datasets to find recurring concepts and ideas from the data collected through the semistructured interviews, business documents, reflective journaling, and member checking. Leech and Onwuebuzie (2007) explained that constant comparison analysis is ideal for researchers aiming to use an entire dataset to deductively or abductively find themes. By means of a constant comparison analysis, I read and separated similar data from my semistructured interviews, business documents, and interview notes into sections, and assign a color code to all sections. I used the coded sections as a basis for reoccurring concepts and ideas that I can add to member checking data for the participant to review. Leech and Onwuebuzie (2007) explained that researchers using a constant comparison analysis to analyze their data could ask their participants if the concepts and ideas generated from

their interview are accurate. I used the qualitative analysis platform ATLAS.ti to code all

the data received from the semistructured interviews and member checking interviews,

business documents, interview notes, transcriptions, reflective journaling, and direct

observations. Salmona and Kaczynski (2016) stated that the use of qualitative software

promotes rich data analysis, as the researcher can conduct complex coding to view the

data in different ways and achieve more significant data insights.

Castleberry and Nolen (2018) noted that qualitative data analysis software is

useful in developing detailed three-dimensional maps that visually represents the

concepts and ideas and their relationship patterns. On the ATLAS.ti platform, I separated

the recurring concepts and ideas using various combinations of colors, and label

associated concepts and ideas based on actions taken by the leaders, as stated in the

obtained data. I scheduled an automatic process that displayed the coded concepts and

ideas in a structure similar to a classic mind map, and have the new coded concepts and

ideas automatically added to the chart. I used the mind map to further separate the data

into coded lists to determine reasons for each coded category, such as which strategy is

most likely to be used as an employee productivity strategy. Qualitative data analysis

software programs offer a wide array of functions and features that can support the

emergence of new categories and help researchers explore complex meanings that would

have been a daunting task to complete manually (Salmona & Kaczynski, 2016).

Main concepts and ideas found through the constant comparison analysis are the

basis of the data assembly, grouping, and categorizations. To complete the data analysis

process, I graphically portrayed all concepts and ideas in a list format that linked to other

related concepts and ideas using dotted lines. I reviewed the coded concepts and ideas thoroughly to determine what data was represented and analyzed the meaning of the key concepts and ideas. The use of ATLAS.ti platform helped me create narratives from the groups and compare them to existing literature. Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules (2017) explained that for readers to determine whether a data collection is credible, qualitative researchers must establish that their data analysis was precise and consistent through detailed disclosing of the data analysis method. If readers are unclear about the data analysis procedure or researcher assumptions in the study, the readers will be unable to evaluate the trustworthiness of the study data (Norwell, et al., 2017).

Reliability and Validity

Qualitative researchers address a study's reliability and validity through related attributes, such as dependability, that measure and determine reliability and validity values in a study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that determining internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity of a study includes analysis by four naturalistic analogs (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability and (d) confirmability, with testing beginning early in the study and lasting throughout the study.

Reliability

Reliability is the extent of the replications of research findings (Merriam & Grenier, 2018). Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that a consistent repetition of inquiry results demonstrates the concept of reliability. To expand, Lincoln and Guba explained how dependability is a criterion for reliability as it is important to consider instances of both factors in research when deliberating results as reliable. To ensure dependability, I

conducted member checking follow-up interviews, used my interview protocol during the interviews, and used my direct observation protocol. Additionally, to substantiate dependability of the study findings, I interviewed all of the leaders in a single technology consulting small business who have strategies to increase employee productivity. Birt et al. (2016) noted that researchers use member checking to verify the accuracy of the data collected during the interview. I used my interview protocol to ensure I adhere to my interview questions and remember key points. Patton (2015) explained that an interview protocol is an instrument that researchers could use to ask questions for specific project related information. Likewise, Castillo-Montoya (2016) mentioned that researchers could mark their interview protocol when determining which key questions are important to ask during the interview. Furthermore, I used my direct observation protocol to track and prioritize my observational data. Lloyd and Wehby (2019) explained that researchers using a direct observation protocol could develop a design that best fits their research questions and can make decisions that impact the reliability of their observations and the feasibility of their chosen measurement system.

Validity

Noble and Smith (2015) explained that to determine validity in a study, researchers must make judgments about the accuracy of the research in relation to the application and appropriateness of the methods used to reach the final conclusions. To ensure validity of my research findings, I used multiple types of data from varying sources to reach data saturation and data triangulation. I used data from sources such as (a) in-person semistructured interviews with member checking follow-up interviews

using open-ended inquiry techniques, (b) direct observation, (c) reflective journaling, and (d) business documents. A researcher must understand their research context to obtain valid research (Kasim, Al-Gahuri, 2015). I used member checking interviews and my interview protocol to validate my data. Additionally, to ensure valid data, I reached data saturation by interviewing all of the leaders in a single technology consulting small business who have strategies to increase employee productivity.

Credibility. To demonstrate credibility, I ensured my participants approved a synopsis of their interview through member checking interviews. Additionally, I verified data saturation with study data from multiple sources such as the semistructured interviews with member checking follow-up interviews, direct observations, and organizational documents. I wrote all influences and personal biases of the study and ensured clear explanations for all processes used in the study. Researchers incorporate methodological strategies such as acknowledging biases, meticulous record keeping, rich descriptions of participant accounts, and respondent validation (Noble & Smith, 2015).

Confirmability. I confirmed my data through member checking and data triangulation. Through member checking, I can confirm that the participant's given responses for this study were correctly analyzed. Amankwaa (2016) defined confirmability as the degree of neutrality for study results to be formed by the respondents and not through researcher bias or motivation. To establish confirmability, Amankwaa suggested that using multiple sources of data to reach data triangulation will ensure confirmability and recommended a journaling as an example of methods to establish confirmability.

Transferability. I followed the analysis techniques stated in this study and used my interview protocols to reach data saturation. I left the decision of transferability to readers and future researchers. Korstjens and Moser (2018) explained that a researcher's responsibility for transferability is to provide a detailed description of the research process to enable the reader to assess whether the findings are transferable. Kerstjens and Moser continued by stating that the readers make the transferability judgement because you do not know their specific setting.

Transition and Summary

Section 1 of this employee productivity research project included the problem statement, purpose statement, nature of the study, and reasoning for choosing a qualitative methodology and a single case study design. Section 1 also contained the overarching research question, aligned interview questions, details about the BEM conceptual framework, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and a thorough review of professional and academic literature.

In Section 2, I introduced key features of the research plan. I restated the purpose statement, discussed the researcher's role as the main collection instrument, explanation for my choice to use qualitative methodology, participant eligibility criteria, reasoning for the use of a census in this study, and participant sampling techniques. Section 2 also included my strategies to gain access to participants and establish a working relationship, strategies to ensure ethical research, data collection instruments I used in this study, data collection techniques, data organization approaches, methods for data analysis, and procedures as I demonstrated reliability and validity.

Section 3 includes a presentation of the qualitative findings for this employee productivity study, professional applications of the results, and implications for social change. In Section 3, I offer recommendations for current actions, ideas for further research, a reflection of the study, and with a concluding statement and list of appendices.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies technology consulting small business leaders used to increase employee productivity. In Sections 1 and 2, I provided elucidation on the importance of the study to small business leaders, as well as information about the design and implementation procedures of the study. Through data analysis, findings that were associated with employee productivity strategies included (a) precise interpersonal communication with employees, (b) pragmatic approach to employee proficiencies and deficiencies, (c) mentoring and empowering employees, and (d) flat hierarchy and organizational values

This final section includes a discussion of (a) the findings containing the themes supported by the data, (b) possible applications to professional practice, (c) implications to social change, (d) recommendations for actions and further research, (e) a reflection of my experience, and (f) a concluding statement. My data collection consisted of in-person semistructured interviews with member checking follow-up interviews using open-ended inquiry techniques, direct observation, reflective journaling, and a review of business documents. I found that the study findings aligned with BEM and theories found in recent literature included in my literature review.

Presentation of the Findings

Identifying what strategies technology consulting small business leaders use to increase employee productivity was the overarching question for this study. This section encompasses an introduction of reoccurring themes found via analysis of data received

from the technology consulting small business leaders regarding their experience in

implementing employee productivity strategies. This presentation of findings includes

four themes: (a) precise interpersonal communication with employees, (b) pragmatic

approach to employee proficiencies and deficiencies, (c) mentoring and empowering

employees, and (d) flat hierarchy and organizational values. Participants in the study

were leaders in a small technology consulting business that have implemented successful

employee productivity strategies.

A qualitative study with numerous identified themes could obtain idiosyncratic

meanings that I identified for this study. Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, and Snelgrove

(2016) explained that qualitative text could involve multiple meanings that require the

researcher to identify those subjective meanings to answer the study questions. I, as the

researcher, found four main themes to answer the questions in this study.

I achieved data saturation as no new themes emerged from data collected from

participants, direct observations, a review of organizational documents, and

methodological triangulation of all data. Following data collection procedures, I assigned

pseudonyms to the participants for confidentiality. Additionally, I interpreted the data for

themes using a constant comparative analysis approach. Berger (2016) explained that

qualitative comparative analysis captures high degrees of complexity through conditions

that can be combinations of numerous variables. All of the themes align with Thomas

Gilbert's (1978) BEM through the findings of business and performance attitudes.

Theme 1: Precise Interpersonal Communication with Employees

Clear and concise communication with employees was a common strategy stated by participants when asked about the best approaches to improve employee productivity. Leaders influence the work behavior of employees (Tripathi, Priyadarshi, Kumar, & Kumar, 2020). Throughout the interviews, participants expressed the importance of clear communication and the use of it as a leader in a small business. Leadership is a process of which mutual understanding is crucial, and the communication between leaders and employees should be a convergence that is information-rich to promote effective leadership, and to sustain a positive leader-employee relationship (Braun et al., 2019).

To expand on precise communication, Casey (pseudonym) pointed out that the small size of the organization encourages employees to consider their work groups as family, with supportive relationships during projects. Casey continued by stating, "Employees that have the same mindset make projects easier and support each other." This explains the importance of organizational size when communicating with employees.

The need for precise communication with employees was also a common answer when asked about beneficial employee productivity strategies. Oscar (pseudonym) noted the significance of precise communication with employees by stating, "I am available to answer any questions and try to provide all the things needed to complete their tasks. They feel confident about their tasks and talking to me, and that increases employee productivity." Leadership can influence subordinate perception, work attitudes, and

behaviors, thus influencing the performance of their teams (Ye, 2019). In response to motivational discussion strategies in leadership, Jack (pseudonym) posited:

> I don't believe that you can in a sustainable fashion motivate people to performance based upon fear or threats or simply by pushing. In my experience, that motivation has to come from the person themselves and that my job is to equip them, help them understand what the goal is, what the process is, and to equip them to do their job as well as possible with whatever tools I'm able to provide to them. I then measure what's important and have an open discussion about that measurement with them.

> Coates (2015) explained that motivation stimulates employees to perform well but comes from within the employee. Additionally, in a study evaluating small business turnover, Ugoami (2016) stated that good internal communication ensures opportunities for employees to voice suggestions and enables the organization to amend the strategies in response to the employee's observation. During my direct observations, I noticed that employees had a relaxed body language with the leadership. I frequently noticed employees and the leaders behind a shared computer screen discussing a project.

In interview questions 5 and 7, I asked the participants what key challenges they faced to implement employee productivity strategies, and advice they would give to other small business leaders. Leonard (pseudonym) discussed challenges stating, "We previously had situations where teams were having difficulty working together because of a gap in communication. I believe we have improved upon that and try to avoid misunderstandings." More so, Leonard detailed. "The key challenge was understanding

people's personalities and being able to communicate with them. It is important to understand how people from all different types of backgrounds communicate."

Leaders assist in improving adaptively by inspiring the need for change and providing articulating the organization's future direction (Tripathi, Priyadarshi, Kumar, & Kumar, 2020). Remarking that leaders can affect employee productivity through their feedback, Lucas (pseudonym) explained:

> One key strategy is constructive feedback after a project. I feel you have to motivate people regardless of the type of feedback that you are going to give them. Whether that's something that you weren't very happy with, I feel like productivity doesn't increase if you hit somebody too hard, but rather if you use that time as an opportunity to empower somebody for next time.

Additionally, Oscar stated, "It is important for employees to know what is being expected in order for them to be productive." This supports the concepts that employees perform more efficiently when internal communication is precise and unambiguous when communicating about projects. Agreeing, Casey remarked that it is important to listen to employees, as they are the professionals hired to do the work and are significantly involved in the projects.

Affiliation to literature and conceptual framework. Employee productivity studies confirm the discoveries in Theme 1 on the importance of precise leadership communication to employees. In a manuscript regarding ways employees translates signals from their organization's listening environment to relevance and meaning, Reed, Goolsby, and Johnston (2016) posited that managers listening and providing constructive

feedback increase employee productivity and general confidence. To expand, Yap, Absul-Rahman, and Chen (2017) explained that effective communication improves interaction and efficiency in teams. All participants felt that it was important to clearly speak and have an open communication channel with employees.

Facilitating discussions can also increase employee productivity. Raj and Zaid (2014) explained that discussions facilitated by leaders encourage leader-employee interaction. Leaders that permit employees to be part of the management process and welcome ideas will increase employee productivity (Raj & Zaid, 2014). In a study about employee retention and active engagement, Raj and Zaid (2014) found that more than half of the participants mentioned the importance of facilitating discussions with employees. Direct observations of relaxed body language and informal impromptu meetings demonstrated the success of open communication. I wrote in my reflective journal about the relaxed atmosphere that seemed different from what I thought I would see in a busy company. Quarter business records indicated an increase of completed projects, which improved profits.

Alternately, poor communication strategies can confuse employees and reduce their productivity. A leader's communication with employees either slowly builds trust, slowly erodes trust, or instantly destroys trust in the relationship (Weisman, 2017). A lack of interaction results in negative employee work behaviors (Yang & Treadway, 2018). All participants mentioned the importance of clear instructions and avoidance of confusing requests. To expand, Weisman (2017) stated that clear communication is as simple as confirming dates, locations for meetings, and times. Leaders that do not

recognize the importance of human assets risk organizational failure (Gambardella, 2015).

This study's conceptual framework, Thomas Gilbert's (1978) BEM, was appropriate for this theme as driven principles from the model focus on communication to improve employee performance. More so, the precise interpersonal communication theme found in this study directly correlates with the information variable of the BEM that influences individuals in their workplace as the data collected focused on the importance of precise communication with employees. To expand, Stull (2019) explained that the BEM is a popular instrument for recognizing factors that affect workplace performance and is often used as a guide to improve employee performance. Communication, specifically interpersonal communication, was a common reply when asked about strategies they have used to increase employee productivity in the past.

Theme 2: Pragmatic Approach to Employee Proficiencies and Deficiencies

Understanding and pragmatically approaching the topic of employee proficiencies and deficiencies was a theme that emerged through the data analysis process. In a study regarding competency-based management approaches, Draganidis and Mentzas (2006) noted that proficiencies are a combination of tacit knowledge, behavior, and skills that gives the employee an effective potential when completing tasks. Interview questions 1 and 2 asked about how they measured employee productivity and strategies they employed that resulted in increased productivity among their employees. In a response about how they measure employee productivity, Leonard stated, "We measure productivity by meeting deadlines and how good we are at meeting them." Agreeing,

Lucas noted, "The quality of work, communication, and teamwork are important aspects we look at." This supports the concepts of how pragmatic approaches to employee proficiencies and deficiencies enable leaders to measure work quality and efficacy. Alex (pseudonym) also measures employee productivity via work quality. "I measure productivity by the quality of work and whether products are being completed in a timely manner," Alex stated.

Additionally, comprehension of employee proficiencies and deficiencies was a frequent reply when asked about strategies to increase employee productivity. Leaders need to know what organization performance they are trying to achieve to identify employee competencies (Draganidis & Mentzas, 2006). To expand on understanding employee proficiencies and deficiencies, Jack explained, "One of the key aspects in effective management is that you have to know what their strengths and weaknesses are and shore their weaknesses or amplify their strengths." More so, Oscar noted, "When I assign employees, I ask for their background and try to be as upfront with their tasks as possible." Effective management of employees supports the concept that employees rely on leaders to have open communication with them regarding their abilities and assist them in improving. Furthermore, with the topic of employee feedback on proficiencies and deficiencies, Lucas stated:

> If I saw somebody struggling with something, we may talk about how we can make that better next time. The same thing with positive feedback. If there was something that was done well by my teammates on a project, I will give them that feedback.

Regarding employee feedback for projects, Alex added, "Team effort is important, and I make sure we meet to discuss solutions and challenges daily. Sometimes the meetings are informal to discuss strategies."

Affiliation to literature and conceptual framework. Understanding employees' efficiencies and deficiencies can be essential to improving employee productivity. In a study regarding the impact of training and development, Zahoor, Muhammad, and Ali (2019) explained that employee performance is a key building block that improves overall performance of the organization. All participants noted that employees feel as though they are growing when they have help improving their deficiencies and improving or highlighting their efficiencies. Recent company documentation showed an increase in completed projects, with the website explaining their organizational approaches, teams, and foundation. During my direct observation, I noticed how employees would ask their leadership and teams questions using open body language. Throughout my direct observation, there were several impromptu meetings prompted by employees that the leaders participated in while in their offices. The employees were able to casually meet to discuss the project and ask questions with their team members. Dahou and Hacini (2018) explained that to remain competitive, organizations must attain high performance in quality, cost, or speed.

Alternatively, not taking the time to understand employee proficiencies and deficiencies can limit productivity and reduce motivation. In a study focused on job satisfaction and team performance though a transformational leadership relationship, Braun, Peus, Weisweiler, and Frey (2013) discovered that a lack of a performance

appraisal negatively affected employees' motivation. Employees not being facilitated can develop low self-esteem (Yuliaty, 2017). More so, in a study about environmental attitude and employee engagement in the automobile industry, Sharma (2014) found that leaders that fail to act after seeking feedback from employees hinders employee efficiency. Zahoor, Muhammad, and Ali (2019) explained that employee performance is directly proportional to organizational performance

Furthermore, Thomas Gilbert's (1978) BEM, the study's conceptual framework, is appropriate for this theme as one of the principles of the model is the importance of understanding *why* and *what* people do to increase overall productivity. The repetition of this theme during data analysis proved the importance of understanding the employee to increase their happiness and overall productivity. In a study about engineering employee performance, Brock (2019) stated that it is imperative to align what employees do with why they are doing it. To comprehend how to improve employee proficiencies and deficiencies, it is crucial to know what they do and why they need to function. All participants noted the importance of giving employees the tools they need to do their job adequately. In my direct observation, I noticed that for a few hours the hallway was busy with the installation of new furniture and accessories for the organization. Additionally, the employees had large monitors and large desks in their offices. I felt excited for the employee's new equipment and the space they had available to work in their offices. More so, the organizations' mission, vision, and value statements promote the empowerment of innovativeness and excellence in their employees.

Theme 3: Mentoring and Empowering Employees

Empowering employee leadership strategies enable leaders to mentor and put employees and teams in control of their day. Leaders foster self-confidence among their employees by giving them a sense of power, and by doing so, they enhance the feeling of self-efficacy and competence (Tripathi, Priyadarshi, Kumar, & Kumar, 2020). "If you're micromanaging everything, then the business really can't grow or won't grow," Alex explained. "I think it's important for business leaders to know where that line is, where they can step back, and let the employees run with things and when they need to step in and help." In a study regarding empowering leadership, Martin, Liao, and Campbell (2012) stated that empowering strategies increased task proficiencies and proactive behaviors. Additionally, Jack noted the importance of rewards for good performance, along with empowering employees.

Ugoami (2016) explained that employees usually have great ideas that can lead to access to new markets, innovations, services, or new product lines that can improve overall competitiveness. More so, empowered employees have a sense of autonomy and competence to perform well, which affects task proficiency (Tripathi, Priyadarshi, Kumar, & Kumar, 2020). Alex stated:

> We give teams the freedom to do what they thought would help move the needle in the direction that we wanted, and then have a compensation plan that did not have a ceiling, so that they could go as hard as they wanted to achieve the results that they were hoping to achieve for themselves personally.

In a study about competency-based management and approaches, Draganidis and Mentzas (2006) noted that leaders with people management competencies excite team members to corporate with their colleagues to achieve a common goal. Casey expounded the importance of leaders explaining goals and their benefits to employees. "Not everyone understands the goal so there can be some pushback," Casey stated, and then further noted. "It is important to relay information in laymen terms and make sure your employees understand the goals and benefits of the project to the organization." Noguerol (2018) explained that creative ideas and solutions to problems are solicited from employees included in the process. More so, leaders can assist in improving adaptively by inspiring the need for change and providing communication on the organization's future direction.

Affiliation to literature and conceptual framework. Mentoring and empowering employees that do the work daily was a common theme with all of the participants. In a study regarding employee enfranchisement, Dahou and Hacini (2018) explained that empowering employees in their jobs, delegating responsibilities and providing them autonomies in their work will improve their professional satisfaction, productivity, and citizenship which affects the organizations' performance. Moreover, in a study using leadership theories as a referential theoretical framework, Noguerol (2018) stated that leaders stimulate their employee's effort to be innovative by questioning their assumptions and reframing problems with no criticism of mistakes. Additionally, Nolan (2015) explained that when leaders perceive to have a genuine interest in their development, employees may feel motivated and obliged to return the positive gesture.

Participants explained that having a strong interest in mentoring and discussing future goals with employees increased their employees' happiness and productivity. Kim and Fernandez (2017) found that the empowerment of employees often led to feelings of self-efficiency and importance.

Mumuni and O'Reilly (2014) posited that communication between leaders and employees should include clear goals. All participants mentioned the importance of giving employees clear goals and offering reasons on why the task is important. Two participants explained that unclear explanations just confuse employees, which makes the time to complete projects much longer. According to Kopperud, Martinsen, and Humborstad (2014), the way employees act is correlated directly to how leaders respond to the employee. Participants stated that it is imperative to be concise and respectful when speaking to employees, and that a positive conversation can help with morale and engagement. Organizational success depends on empowered employees (Yuliaty, 2017)

Furthermore, poor leader-employee relationships may encourage employees to search for other opportunities or leave without advanced notice (Palanski, Avey, & Jiraporn, 2014). Casey stated that other organizations would try to take your employees; however, if the employees are happy, they will not leave the organization. It is important for small businesses to keep their employees to limit turnover and increase overall productivity in the organization. More so, Dahou and Hacini (2018) noted that employees are valuable and play an important role in the organizations' success. Empowered employees with relevant skills and tools can support the organization in reaching business goals while creating a competitive edge (Dahou & Hacini, 2018).

This theme on mentoring and empowering employees correlates with Thomas Gilbert's (1978) BEM using the information column in the model that focuses on data and knowledge in both the environment and individual. For exemplary performance, employees should understand their position and learn new processes as technology grows. Data accumulated through company documents showing completed projects exhibited the importance of empowering and mentoring employees.
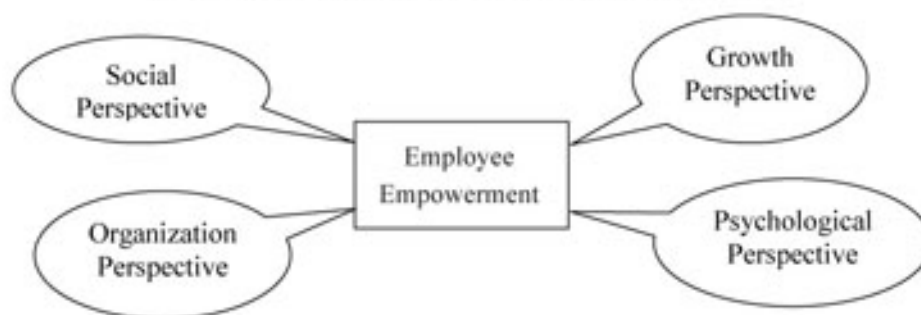
Figure 4. An image of the perspectives of employee management. This figure illustrates how employee empowerment affects an employee's social, growth, organization and physiological perspectives. Reprinted from "Employee Empowering Through Information Technology and Creativity," by F. Yulliaty, 2017, *Journal of Economic & Management Perspectives, 11*(3), p. 55.

Theme 4: Flat Hierarchy and Organizational Values

A flat organizational hierarchy and positive organization values can contribute to an employees' feeling of value and belonging. In a study concerning strategic employee implementation strategies, Sikora and Ferris (2014) explained that to promote employee performance, leaders must create a supportive culture that encourages engagement. A flat hierarchy, relating to leaders and their employees, may enable the leaders to work closely

with their employees with equal footing and mutual respect. Ugoami (2016) stated that good internal communication ensures opportunities for employees to voice suggestions and enables the organization to amend the strategies in response to the employee's observation. More so, in a study about employee burnout in the information technology field, Cook (2015) explained that employees that are not consulted in changes may feel insufficient and disrespected.

The leaders noted their hands-on approach as a manager and the organizational approach to a flat hierarchy. Alex posited, "New managers feel like they need to be the boss." Additionally, Oscar explained, "I do not care whether a person is a lower or higher rank; I feel that you should treat everyone like a team member." Via direct observation, I noticed that team members had a calm demeanor when speaking with the leaders and there was a focus of mutual respect when the leaders listened to the employee give their professional opinion on projects. A statement in the organization's code of ethics stated that they will not compromise their principles for short-term gain and that ethical performance and personal integrity are held in high regard. Oscar and Jack detailed the importance of faith and respect in the workplace. Building upon the importance of veneration, Oscar stated "There are many personalities in the workplace, and they all need to be respected."

Furthermore, Alex remarked on the significance of general employee happiness. "Employees need to be happy when we're working," Alex said. "That's a big thing for productivity, because if somebody is not happy, they're not going to be productive." Happy employees can create a positive workforce and improve organizational dynamics

for a healthy work environment. People are the most valuable business asset, so it is imperative that small business leaders know how to manage their employees, make them team-oriented, keep them informed, and allow feedback regarding organizational developments (Ugoami, 2016). Regarding happy employees, Casey acknowledged that enthusiastic employees are more productive and enjoy project challenges. "Happy employees that feel like the leadership is listening and supportive are less likely to be taken by competitors. People say it is not about money, but happiness and the way the organization makes them feel." Overall, all eight participants emphasized that supportive leadership styles and positive organizational values increase employee productivity. The code of ethics that employees receive and sign when onboarding, also stated that performance is the sum of employee ethics. During my direct observation, I noticed that each manager had an inviting office with open doors and conference tables for meetings, and desks positioned to face toward the door so that they could be easily seen from the hallway. I believe the layout of the room, along with the open doors, were welcoming to employees that needed to speak to the managers.

Affiliation to literature and conceptual framework. Having a positive demeanor and relationship with employees in the work environment was a common theme among participants. In a study regarding factors that influence employee motivation, Chauhan, Goel, & Arora (2014) supported that the development of a positive working relationship with employees establishes confidence and trust. A leader's ability to establish a positive work environment will lead to organizational success (Chauhan et al., 2014). All participants mentioned the importance of the leader-employee relationship

and that it was important to have a calm demeanor, especially when there are issues or when making mistakes. Additionally, Breevaart et al., (2014) asserted that a leaders' character displayed in the work environment influence the measures of employee engagement and productivity. More so, communication between leaders and employees increases the employee's satisfaction level (Nolan, 2015). This explains the importance of leaders' attitudes and values in the workplace. De Clerq et al. (2014) noted that focusing on the needs of employees could allow leaders to foster atmospheres that generate engaging behaviors.

This study's conceptual framework, Thomas Gilbert's (1978) BEM, is appropriate for this theme as one focus of the BEM is understanding the work environment of the employee and how it affects their performance. Brock (2019) expounded that the model lists six behaviors for competent behavior, with three being environmental. Furthermore, all the participants noted the importance of their values and how their attitudes affect the workplace.

Applications to Professional Practice

Unproductive employees can affect the mission and strategy of the organization and leaders failing to improve employee productivity in their organization can limit the growth, success, and survival of the organization in their marketplace. If considered, the results of this qualitative case study can assist leaders in understanding how to encourage and maintain a high level of employee productivity. Leaders can use the findings of this study to implement effective employee productivity strategies in areas that may be underperforming.

Moreover, the information shared by the participants could provide leadership in small businesses with useful information on what strategies work best to improve employee productivity and the surmounted tribulations suffered to create a productive and positive work environment. My goal is that the findings from this study assist small business leaders with improving their strategies for employee productivity in their organization.

Implications for Social Change

Implication for social change accentuated by this study has the potential to contribute to small business social changes as productive employees work more efficiently. Jha and Kumar (2016) explained that a highly productive workforce increases profitability by 40% and productivity by 78%. The data gathered in this study can help managers impact social change by improving employee efficiency that will affect both the organization and local communities through profitable growth and increased job opportunities. New and increasing job opportunities could increase public funding through local spending, which affects neighborhoods through improved community programs. Additionally, more local spending and tax dollars may also improve community services such as police and community fire departments.

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the strategies technology consulting small business leaders use to increase employee productivity. Employee productivity and the need for useful strategies continues to be a concern for leaders who aim to increase employee productivity in their organization. Additionally, it is important for leaders to identify which strategies work best in their organization to motivate their

employees and increase productivity. Small business leaders can use the strategies noted in this study as a guide to improving their employee productivity and increasing their growth through content employees.

Recommendations for Action

The recommendations associated with the findings of this study include (a) develop efficient communication with employees to enhance understanding of job requests, (b) strive for transparent leadership and implementation of policies to allow for open communication between employees and leadership, (c) provide timely and consistent feedback to employees to develop positive rapport, and (d) mentor and understand employee strengths and weaknesses to encourage improvements in job skills or new interests.

Small business leaders may find the information and strategies practical in this study useful in increasing employee productivity in their organization.

Recommendations for Further Research

The focus of this study was on employee productivity strategies small business technology leaders used to improve employee productivity in their organization. The study was specific to a single small technology consulting business in Texas. The population for the study included a census of eight participants in leadership roles and their perspectives of employee productivity strategies. I noted several limitations of the study and recommendations of key areas for future research. Limitations are weaknesses or conditions that can affect the external validity of a study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Study limitations included (a) limited sample size, (b) time constraints of data collection,

(c) specific focus on leadership perspective, and (d) geographic location. A study's results and integrity can be affected by individual biases. (Shaw & Satalkar, 2018). To limit by biases, I followed all ethical principles throughout the study and ensured I abided by all stated steps set in my data collection and analysis sections.

The limited sample size consisting of small business leaders may hinder the usefulness of the results outside of the studied organization. The goal is to select a sample size that will yield rich data to understand the phenomenon and may vary per the characteristics of each study (Hennink, Kaiser, & Webar, 2019). The results of this study may not be conducive to find other types of productivity in the studied location. The time constraint of one month to collect my data could affect the results and I may have obtained different results if the study timeline was longer. To avoid this limitation, future researchers could extend the data gathering timeframe or visit more often than once a week.

Selected participants resided in Texas, which limited the sample location for collecting study data. The reduced selection and specialties in this state for small business consulting organizations may be different or have specific focuses that other small businesses in different residences do not have. Future researchers could conduct this study in a separate location do determine whether strategies from the leadership of the small technology consulting business corresponds with the results of this study.

Reflections

Completing this doctoral study for my Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) provided encouragement and the opportunity to enhance my professional and academic

skills. I have gained a greater understanding of the workings of small businesses and their specific needs to successfully compete in their marketplace. My appreciation extends to the technology consulting organization that allowed me to interview and observe their leaders while they interacted with their employees.

Researching, writing, and editing this study has sparked my interest on the business side of IT. Completing sessions in the program encouraged me to explore various types of businesses and their needs to be successful, particularly in IT. Through research, I have learned to objectively and thoroughly analyze data with limited personal bias. My hope is that small business leaders find the strategies stated in this study useful in increasing their overall employee productivity.

Conclusion

The study results illuminated vital elements that define successful employee productivity strategies in their organization. Those key elements included (a) precise interpersonal communication with employees, (b) pragmatic approach to employee proficiencies and deficiencies, (c) mentoring and empowering employees, (d) flat hierarchy and organizational values. I found that the themes aligned with current literature and the conceptual framework. Small business leaders that apply the findings of this study may improve employee productivity in their organization.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol	
What you will do	**What you will say—script**
Introduce the interview and set the stage—often over a meal or coffee	**Introductory Statement and Signature of Papers** *Good morning/afternoon, my name is Dalinda Milne. Thank you very much for coming and helping with my study. This interview will last approximately one hour to 90 minutes during which I will be asking you about strategies you have used as a leader to increase employee productivity at _____.* *The purpose of my study is to identify strategies that increase employee productivity in small technology consulting businesses similar to _____.*
Review aspects of consent form. Ensure the participant understands the content	**Consent Forms** *Before we get started, please sign the three release forms as an indication that you agree to speak to me about your experiences in implementing successful employee motivation strategies for use in my doctoral study.*

of the form and signs all of the forms. Wait for signatures.	*The first form, study agreement, verify that you are giving me your consent to record our discussion today, and agree that I may use the information you provide in my study.* *The second form, statement of participant confidentiality, indicates your understanding that I will keep your information confidential.* *The last form, the informed participation consent form, is a reminder that: (a) all information you provide is confidential, (b) your participation is voluntary, and you may stop participating in the study at any time, and (c) I do not intend to inflict any harm.* *So you are aware, I will be the only one with access to the tapes and notes I gather today.* *Thank you for your agreeing to participate and sharing your experiences.*

Ask to record the interview and ensure the participant states their approval.	**Recording Permission** *To facilitate my notetaking, I would like to audiotape our conversation today. The purpose of the recording is so I can get all of the details and at the same time actively focus on our conversation. Is that okay?* **If yes**: Thank you! Please let me know if at any point you would like me to turn off the recorder or keep something off record. **If no**: Thank you for letting me know. I will only take notes of our conversation.
Ensure participant understands they can ask questions at any time throughout the interview.	**Initial Questions** *Before we begin the interview, are there any questions you would like to ask?* **If yes**: discuss questions **If no**: If any questions arise at any point in the study, please feel free to ask them at any time. I am more than happy to answer your questions.

- Watch for non-verbal queues - Paraphrase as needed - Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in depth	1. How do you measure employee productivity?
	2. What strategies have you employed that resulted in increased productivity among your employees?
	3. What strategies that you implemented resulted in the most improvement in employee productivity?
	4. What organizational changes occurred as a result of increased employee productivity?
	5. What were the key challenges you had to address to implement the strategies for increasing employee productivity?
	6. What else would you like to share regarding employee productivity improvement strategies that we did not already cover?
	7. If you could give advice to other small business leaders aiming to increase their employee productivity, what would that be?
	8. Before we conclude this interview, is there something about your experience in improving employee productivity that we have not yet had a chance to discuss?
Bridge all learning after the initial interview questions and reflect on questions that you have unanswered after probing.	**Reflection** You said earlier that _____ or Can you clarify _____
Wrap up interview thanking participant	**Conclude Interview**

	Thank you for your time. You have given me a very clear explanation of how you increased employee productivity at _____.
Schedule follow-up member checking interview	**Follow up Interview Request** If possible, I would appreciate the opportunity to verify that I understood your responses correctly by scheduling a follow-up interview. At that time, I will have a succinct synopsis of your responses for you to review. **If yes**: Is there a specific time you prefer? Again, thank you very much for your time and help. **If no**: Thank you again for your time and help.
Introduce follow-up interview and set the stage	**Follow Up Interview** Thank you for agreeing to another interview with me. This follow-up interview is to ensure I understand your responses from our initial interview. I have prepared a synopsis of your responses for you to view and provide feedback.

Share a copy of the succinct synthesis for each individual question	Below are the synopsis of your responses from our last interview. Please verify they are correct and please let me know if anything needs editing.
Bring in probing questions related to other information that you may have found— note the information must be related so that you are probing and adhering to the IRB approval. Walk through each question, read the interpretation and ask: Did I miss anything? Or, what would you like to add?	1. How do you measure employee productivity? *Add a succinct synthesis of the interpretation- perhaps one paragraph.*
	2. What strategies have you employed that resulted in increased productivity among your employees? *Add a succinct synthesis of the interpretation- perhaps one paragraph.*
	3. What strategies that you implemented resulted in the most improvement in employee productivity? *Add a succinct synthesis of the interpretation- perhaps one paragraph.*
	4. What organizational changes occurred as a result of increased employee productivity? *Add a succinct synthesis of the interpretation- perhaps one paragraph.*

	5. What were the key challenges you had to address to implement the strategies for increasing employee productivity? *Add a succinct synthesis of the interpretation- perhaps one paragraph.*
	6. What else would you like to share regarding employee productivity improvement strategies that we did not already cover? *Add a succinct synthesis of the interpretation- perhaps one paragraph.*
	7. If you could give advice to other small business leaders aiming to increase their employee productivity, what would that be? *Add a succinct synthesis of the interpretation- perhaps one paragraph.*
	8. Before we conclude this interview, is there something about your experience in improving employee productivity that we have not yet had a chance to discuss? *Add a succinct synthesis of the interpretation- perhaps one paragraph.*

Appendix B: Direct Observation Protocol

Direct Observation Protocol	
Steps	Procedures
Schedule direct observation dates with CEO or point-of-contact. *Only the behavior of the leadership will be recorded.	I will meet with the CEO or the point-of-contact to schedule times and dates for me to conduct direct observations of leaders implementing employee productivity strategies.
Duration of observations	I will make four site visits from 9 a.m. - 12 a.m. once a week for a total of one month.
Scheduled dates and times of direct observations. *No data regarding lower level employees or customers will be recorded.	1. Date/Time: 2. Date/Time: 3. Date/Time: 4. Date/Time:
Observation areas	I will conduct discreet direct observations in common areas and by attending meetings.
Take notes	I will take notes on leadership interaction with their employees.
End of observations and wrap-up	I will thank the CEO or point-of-contact for allowing me to conduct my direct observational research for my doctoral study. This is the end of direct observations.