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Strategies to Overcome Barriers to a More Effective Leadership Style

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College of Management and Technology

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David Barnwell

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2015

Abstract

Strategies to Overcome Barriers to a More Effective Leadership Style

by

David Jackson Barnwell, Jr.

MBA, Belhaven University, 2012

BBA, Belhaven University, 2003

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

January 2016

Abstract

Disengaged employees and leaders lacking the skills to engage their employees account for an estimated $300 billion annual loss through lowered productivity. This study focused on a leader's understanding of employee engagement as a means of increasing productivity. Utilizing the theory of leadership styles and expectancy theory for the conceptual framework, this descriptive study explored strategies small business leaders have used to develop effective leadership styles to improve workplace engagement. Interviews with a purposive sample of 20 highest-ranking executives at small businesses with between 50 and 250 employees in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States were analyzed using the modified van Kaam method to identify themes. The analysis of leaders' actions regarding strategies for overcoming barriers to employee engagement indicated a strategic need for meetings, open and candid communication, and more dedicated time to employees to avoid disengagement. The exploration of these strategies provides insight that organizational leaders could use to implement effective practices. The results of this study could contribute to social change by facilitating proactive recognition by organizational leaders of strategies for overcoming barriers preventing the adoption of a more effective leadership style. These contributions could assist leaders in reducing bureaucratization and shifting attitudes from impersonal judgment and extreme separation to engaging employees. These shifts could result in improving the employees' outlook on their future at their respective organizations, which may, in turn, positively impact their relationships with their families and communities.

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Dedication

I dedicated this doctoral study to my loving, supportive, and tolerant wife, Kim, and our son (her clone), Cooper.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my wife, Kim, and son, Cooper for their patience, love, and support over the years while working on my doctoral studies. They sacrificed their time for me, and I will be forever grateful. Additionally, I would like to thank the multitude of my colleagues at work that provided a willing ear and hand. Further, I would like to acknowledge the direction of David Horton for his patient leadership, John Googe for his manner of instilling knowledge in his own distinctive way, Jerry Callaghan for stimulating conversation and guidance for personal growth, and Shirley Shouse for seeing something in me and introducing me to all the right people. Finally, I wish to acknowledge my parents for providing me (a) an environment growing up that was unique, (b) a myriad of opportunities, (c) a constant desire to succeed, and (d) a never settle attitude.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

As demands in the marketplace fluctuate, clear leadership has been critical for implementing change by engaging employees and ensuring organizational success (Vlachos, Panagopoulos, & Rapp, 2013). However, many organizations do not have leaders who realize how to roll out plans effectively engage their employees (Tatlah, Ali, & Saeed, 2011). Effective leadership is a vital element for enhancing employee performance, and the success of an organization depends on the leader articulating and implementing effective plans that bring about change, buy-in from employees, and dedication to the company (Bevan, 2011).

Previous researchers (Chi, Lan, & Dorjgotov, 2012; Farahani, Taghadosi, & Behboudi, 2011; Krishnan, 2012; Sahin, Çubuk, & Uslu, 2014) have addressed the value of transformational leadership and how its emphasis on organizational commitment, not behavior compliance, has maximized employee performance. The benefits of transformational leadership are the leader’s capability to effect changes to the standards, principles, and organizational buy-in of employees (Hoffman, Bynum, Piccolo, & Sutton, 2011). Transformational leaders raise the prominence of company-wide objectives and the capacity of employees to go outside self-interests to improve the business (Krishnan, 2012).

Given the trials of routine business processes and procedures, a leader’s application of effective leadership behaviors is directly related to profitability (Kouzes & Posner, 2011). I reviewed previous literature on transformational leadership and other leadership styles to explore the rationale behind what barriers prevent small business leaders from adopting a more effective leadership style to improve workplace engagement. My exploration of strategies for overcoming these barriers might provide insights to organizational leaders regarding effective practices. The results of this study could contribute to social change by facilitating proactive recognition by organizational leaders of strategies for overcoming barriers preventing the adoption of a more effective leadership style. These contributions could assist leaders in reducing bureaucratization and shifting attitudes from impersonal judgment and extreme separation to engaging employees. These shifts could result in improving the employees' outlook on their future at their respective organizations, which may, in turn, positively impact their relationships with their families and communities.

Background of the Problem

Previous researchers (Chi et al., 2012; Kalyani & Sahoo, 2011; Overstreet, Hanna, Byrd, Cegielski, & Hazen, 2013; Valentine & Prater, 2011) have examined organizations and their leaders' attempts to foster change and adopt more effective leadership styles within their organizations. Abebe and Angriawan (2011) stated that chief executive officers may face an expanding gap between their expectations of change and their ability to bring about that change. They further noted that even if the leaders do produce change, they might be ineffective at managing their employees after the change. This business problem of ineffective leadership has produced an expensive breach within organizational efficiencies and productivity, and between leaders' knowledge and what they truly alter and implement within their companies (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000).

Pfeffer and Sutton (2000) suggested this disconnect is the fissure between *knowing* and *doing*. Echoing this, Kalyani and Sahoo (2011) have noted that leaders consistently search for ways to enhance productivity and organizational profitability through their style of leadership, but some leaders have not had the knowledge to effectively circumvent the barriers to implementing necessary changes in their leadership style. Kalyani and Sahoo's research compelled my examination of the strategies that small business leaders use to develop effective leadership styles for improving workplace engagement. To address this continuing business problem, I used interviews of organizational leaders to research the strategies small business leaders have used to overcome barriers which have prevented them from adopting more effective leadership styles. Identification of these strategies provided insights on why changes in leadership styles fail or succeed.

Problem Statement

Ineffective leadership styles, in conjunction with a lack of employee commitment and engagement, have accounted for an estimated $300 billion annual loss to U.S. organizations (Maurer, 2011). Studies have found that as much as a 34% positive shift in employee commitment levels has resulted from an effective leadership style, and the performance of an organization has also increased (Lin & Wang, 2012). Leadership is a critical factor for success and plays an essential role in involving and satisfying stakeholders (Al-Hakim & Hassan, 2013). The general business problem has been that low employee commitment levels brought about by ineffective leadership styles have had a negative impact on workplace engagement (Aboyassin & Abood, 2013). The specific business problem has been that some small business leaders have lacked strategies to develop an effective leadership style to improve workplace performance.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore strategies small business leaders have used to develop an effective leadership style to improve workplace engagement. The geographic boundaries of this study were in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States and included Winston-Salem, North Carolina and Greensboro, North Carolina. The target population was the highest-ranking executives at small businesses with between 50 and 250 employees in the Mid-Atlantic region.

According to Jantti and Greenhalgh (2012), many organizations do not have leaders who realize how to incorporate effective plans to inspire staff toward engagement and commitment. The data from the study contributed to new leadership insights, and showed best practices that organizations in this study used to make effective improvements. The ultimate contribution to social change is movement toward a more effective leadership style to improve workplace engagement. The movement towards social change might encourage positive progress on shifting from impersonal judgment and miscommunication to engaging employees in commitment behaviors. This might benefit employees' outlook on their future at their respective organizations, which may resonate within their families and communities.

Nature of the Study

The best methodological approach for this study was qualitative with a descriptive design rather than mixed method or quantitative approaches. When researching individuals' lived experiences to identify and develop strategies on the barriers that prevent small business leaders from adopting a more effective leadership style to improve workplace engagement, researchers require data with depth and breadth, not the numerical data often associated with quantitative and mixed methods (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). Because I explored the experiences of the participants to gain more knowledge, a qualitative research approach was the best methodology to answer the research question.

Quantitative researchers test a theory and examine relationships through analysis of numerical data (Gerring, 2011) and determine if a relationship exists between a set of known variables by asking closed-ended questions (Bryman, 2012). As such, quantitative research was not appropriate to this study's research question, because the purpose of this study was neither to examine relationships between quantitative variables nor to establish whether a relationship existed between known variables by asking closed-ended questions. The basis of this study was the professional and personal experiences of the interviewees rather than any information from a statistical procedure. Thus, I eliminated both quantitative and mixed methods research designs as viable research methods this study.

Bleijenbergh, Korzilius, and Verschuren (2011) stated that the descriptive design allows the exploration of concrete and absolute experiences from participants who report realities from lived experiences. The descriptive design allows participants to respond to interview questions based on their lived experiences. For my study, this design facilitated the timely gathering of actual reasons directly from participants on what strategies small business leaders have used to improve workplace engagement. Other qualitative designs, such as grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies did not provide the necessary information to address the research question. These other designs would have been unable to garner the essential data because they would have required me to (a) use multiple stages of data collection (Nicola, Oliver, & Graham, 2012), (b) study shared patterns of behaviors over a period of time rather than individual experiences (Cruz & Higginbottom, 2013), and (c) collect information using a variety of procedures over a prolonged time frame (Maxwell, 2013).

Research Question

The focus of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore strategies small business leaders have used to develop effective leadership styles to improve workplace engagement. The guiding research question for this study was: What strategies do small business leaders use to develop effective leadership styles to improve workplace engagement?

Interview Questions

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore strategies small business leaders have used to develop effective leadership styles to improve workplace engagement. Borg Debono et al. (2013), Bevan (2011), Kouzes and Posner (2011), and Pater (2011) each presented a theme that I used to guide the development of the research question. The first theme was that some organizations do not have leaders who can effectively elicit high performance and strong cultures which traditionally emanate from employees' engagement behaviors (Pater, 2011). The second theme is that an organization’s success level depends on a leader’s effectiveness at implementing strategies for change (Bevan, 2011). The third theme was that if leaders engage in the best leadership behaviors, then their ability to get employee buy-in and engagement increases (Kouzes & Posner, 2011).

The research question for this study was: What strategies do small business leaders use to develop effective leadership styles to improve workplace engagement? The interview questions allowed for gathering of rich data and provided appropriate responses to the research question (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011; Schultze & Avital, 2011). The small business highest-ranking executives that participated in this study responded to the following interview questions:

1. What organizational actions do you use to engage employees, which might result in an increase in organizational effectiveness?
2. What barriers keep you from engaging employees?
3. What behaviors have your employees demonstrated when you changed leadership style?
4. What actions have hindered your employees from embracing strategies for change?
5. How have you countered the actions that delay you from engaging in the best leadership practices?
6. How do you engage employees?
7. Is there anything you would like to add to this interview to address any aspect of engagement?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study came from both the theory of leadership styles by Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2002) and expectancy theory by Vroom and Deci (1970). In their 2002 book *Primal Leadership*, Goleman et al. suggested that understanding the concept of resonance leads to understanding primal leadership theory because leaders capture their personal origins in each of the six approaches on how to improve their organizations.

Goleman et al. (2002) stated that leaders considered to be at the top of their profession have reached that level by creating resonance. Goleman et al. noted that the leaders who are best at creating resonance were those who engaged their employees, were in tune with their feelings, and guided them by using encouragement. The researchers found that leaders who spoke honestly about their ideals and strategies and elicited the same from their employees achieved resonance by using one of six leadership approaches: (a) visionary, (b) coaching, (c) affiliative, (d) democratic, (e) pacesetting, and (f) commanding (Goleman et al., 2002).

In their expectancy theory, Vroom and Deci (1970) suggested that an individual's behavior results from choices among a variety of options which increase pleasure and decrease pain. They found that (a) there was a positive association between an individual's effort and performance, (b) strong performance resulted in a positive reward, (c) the reward satisfied an individual's need, and (d) the longing to satisfy the individual's need made the effort worthwhile. The main tenets of the expectancy theory are valence and expectancy.

Valence refers to the emotional reactions individuals have had with respect to the outcome (Vroom & Deci, 1970). Expectancy refers to an individual's varied levels of confidence on their capabilities (Vroom & Deci, 1970). Within the expectancy theory, management must discover what employees value and the resources or training employees need to succeed. Both positive valence and an increase in expectancy are key drivers of employee engagement (Vroom & Deci, 1970).

Definition of Terms

Engagement behaviors: Strong bonds that employees and leaders demonstrate when they fully express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally through their actions toward their job responsibilities (Swarnalatha & Prasanna, 2013).

Laissez-faire leadership: Laissez faire leaders give as little possible direction to their subordinates. These leaders believe that people excel if they are able to handle things in their own ways (Chaudhry & Javed, 2012).

Pacesetting resonance: Goleman et al. (2002) stated leaders build pacesetting resonance through accomplishing perplexing and stimulating goals through (a) establishing a strong drive to excel, (b) high standards, (c) impatience, and (d) micromanaging.

Resonance: Goleman et al. (2002) stated that resonance refers to a climate in which leaders are in tune with their employees' feelings and guide the employees in an encouraging fashion while speaking honestly about their values and plans in order to inspire the same from their employees.

Small business: Kalyani and Sahoo (2011) stated that small businesses are traditionally privately owned corporations, proprietorships, or partnerships that have fewer than 500 employees as determined by the Small Business Administration. For purposes of this study, I explored small businesses with a range between 50 and 250 employees.

Transactional leadership: This style of leadership emphasizes administrative issues and assessment of the needs of subordinates to satisfy the subordinates' desires in exchange for work (Ruggieri & Abbate, 2013).

Transformational leadership: Wright, Moynihan, and Pandey (2012) noted that transformational leadership is a certain style of leadership that includes the ability to effect deep change within an organization. Wright et al. further stated that transformational leadership is a process of effecting key changes in the attitudes of a company's stakeholders and creating and growing commitment to the company's mission.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are thoughts that are taken as they are given, but if they were to vanish, the study would have lost relevance (Bleijenbergh et al., 2011). To research this topic, I made six necessary assumptions. First, I assumed sufficient accessibility to the participants of the study to perform the necessary research. Second, I assumed the participants had sufficient knowledge of the topic to contribute to the results of the study. Third, I assumed that the participants responded honestly to the interview questions. Fourth, I assumed that leaders might have changed their leadership style to accommodate their organization. Fifth, I assumed that choosing the wrong conceptual framework to reflect the observations might limit my study's effectiveness (Cole, Chase, Couch, & Clark, 2011). Finally, I assumed that the conceptual framework was a good reflection of the behaviors under study and represented the best approach to answer the research question for this study. I discussed the findings and conclusions in the relevance of the conceptual framework area in Section 3.

Limitations

Limitations are potential weaknesses in the study that were out of my control (Cole et al., 2011). There were five limitations for this research. First, availability of some participants to contribute to the study through detailed interviews might have limited the results. Second, executives had limited time to spare, which might have reduced the number of available participants. Third, this study was a qualitative descriptive study and participants might have given misleading responses or their responses might not have been applicable to all small businesses. Fourth, as the sole researcher collecting data for this study, I might have had subconscious biases that might have arisen without my control. Finally, collection of the data was from a limited number of participants and small businesses. Thus, there was a possibility that responses might not have been relevant to all small businesses.

Delimitations

Delimitations are those characteristics that limited the scope and define the boundaries of the study, but were under my control (Bleijenbergh et al., 2011). For purposes of the study, the first delimitation was that the type of organizations participating did not include nonprofit organizations. Only for-profit small businesses with between 50 and 250 employees were eligible to participate in the study. A second delimitation was the interview questions which I developed, and were thus limited to my own scope and interests. The study's focus on engagement and performance were further delimitations as were its geographic boundaries, the Mid-Atlantic U.S. cities Winston-Salem, North Carolina and Greensboro, North Carolina. Yet another delimitation was that the participants must have worked in their current position for at least 1 year. The final delimitation was that potential participants were first identified from sources including the Mid-Atlantic Executive Area Leader's Society (MEALS), area Chamber of Commerce members, and Rotary members.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

The purpose of this qualitative research was to explore strategies small business leaders have used to develop effective leadership styles to improve workplace engagement. This study generated data that might, if applied, offer leaders the tools to engage their employees by helping them recognize the barriers that prevent organizational leaders from adopting a more effective leadership style. Implementation of the knowledge generated by this study could result in incidences where employees go beyond minimum requirements for their job, and completely commit to the organization by demonstrating additional determination. This is a change that has traditionally aligned with the outcomes of transformational leadership and the constructs within expectancy theory (Krishnan, 2012). The results of this newfound employee commitment might result in financial performance benefits for small for-profit organizations through enhanced efficiency and effectiveness, which might lead to providing cost-effective products and services to their consumers.

Implications for Social Change

The significance of this research was the insights gained and opportunity provided for small business leaders to identify and implement strategies for overcoming barriers that prevent some small business leaders from adopting a more effective leadership style. If leaders were to implement the findings from this study, the people within the marketplace might experience a positive social change through increased employee morale. This potential increase to morale might lead to (a) achieving organizational goals (Lin & Hsiao, 2014), (b) stimulating conversation between the leader and employee, (c) establishing trust, (d) providing better guidance from the leader to the employee, (e) encouraging higher levels of loyalty toward the organization, (f) establishing a solid commitment to the work-place (Zeffane, Tipu, & Ryan, 2011), and (g) cultivating an improved outlook by employees on their future at their respective organizations, which may resonate within their families and communities.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore strategies small business leaders used to develop effective leadership styles to improve workplace engagement. I conducted a comprehensive literature review of relevant topics, which provided a scholarly background to support the need to address the problem. I organized my literature review according to the following subtopics: (a) the definition and role of a leader, (b) leadership competencies to implement organizational success, (c) transformational leadership around employee engagement and resonance, (d) leadership challenges resulting from common leadership errors that lead to employee disengagement, (e) theory of leadership styles, and (f) expectancy theory.

I searched the terms and concepts including *definition of a leader*, *leader competencies*, *leadership styles*, *transformational leadership*, and *leadership challenges* separately and in combination, which produced more than 354 search results. The sources were peer-reviewed journal articles and books from (a) Walden University's online library, (b) EBSCOhost, (c) ProQuest, and (d) ProQuest Dissertations and Theses-Full Text databases. The resulting review provided me useful information from primary sources published from 2011 to present, and ensured that this study had a supported research method and design. This study included 154 references with 140 references that were peer-reviewed and published within the last 5 years.

Themes That Guided the Interview Questions

From the wealth of literature on leadership and leadership styles I found over the course of my literature review, I identified the following three leadership themes that I used to design the interview questions: (a) some organizations did not have leaders who could effectively elicit high performance and strong cultures, which traditionally emanated from engagement behaviors from employees (Pater, 2011); (b) an organization's success level depended on a leader's effectiveness at implementing strategies for change (Bevan, 2011); and (c) if leaders engaged in the best leadership behaviors, then the leaders' ability to obtain employee buy-in and engagement increased (Kouzes & Posner, 2011). Once the interviewees responded to the interview questions, more information emerged on the strategies leaders use to overcome barriers preventing them from adopting more effective leadership styles to improve workplace engagement.

Employee engagement is a key component of effective and high-performing organizations which develops from employees having an emotional and intelligent dedication to an organization (Andrew & Sofian, 2012). The first guiding theme which was most evident in Pater's (2011) work, was that many organizations lacked leaders who could effectively extract high-performance or engagement behaviors from their employees. Pater noted that when leaders acquired the ability to elicit engagement behaviors, employee and organizational performance usually increased.

Organizational leaders who embraced and implemented change have the ability to manage their employees and their organization to higher performance levels (Crawford & Mills, 2011). The second guiding theme, explained by Bevan (2011), was that an organization's level of success depended on the organizational leader's effectiveness at implementing strategies for change. There are several components needed to support a successful transition and adoption of organizational change (Bevan, 2011). Bevan suggested seven dynamics that helped leaders implement change more readily within their organization: (a) alignment, (b) clarity, (c) communication, (d) engagement, (e) leadership, (f) resources, and (g) tracking. If leaders drove toward adherence to Bevan's seven dynamics, then they might better implement change.

Leadership is an intricate interface between individuals and the structure in which groups of individuals interact (Bolden, 2011). Effective leadership comes from adhering to sound leadership practices (Cameron, 2011). The third guiding theme, expressed by Kouzes and Posner (2011), was that if leaders engaged in the best leadership behaviors, then the leaders' ability to get employee buy-in and engagement increased. Kouzes and Posner identified five top behaviors for leaders to elicit employee engagement: (a) modeling the way, (b) inspiring a shared vision, (c) challenging the process, (d) enabling others to act, and (e) encouraging the heart. If leaders adopted the themes expressed above, their ability to connect with their employees and motivate them to effective organizational success improved.

Definition and Role of the Leader

Researchers have defined leadership and the role of a leader in many ways. Findings by Nixon, Harrington, and Parker (2012), Tuckey, Bakker, and Dollard (2012), and Cameron (2011) suggested that hundreds of definitions and skills of a leader have been proposed over the last 30 years. Tuckey et al. stated that one consistent theme in those definitions was the ability to influence others. Cameron added that these definitions of leadership combined suggested that leaders should influence change and understanding, inspire the pursuit of goals, and include everyone within an organization. Additionally, Chen and Chih (2011) and Kempster, Jackson, and Conroy (2011) suggested the importance for organizations to define how to train employees to assume leadership roles and thus effect positive change within their organizations.

Gilson and Mathieu (2012) and McDermott, Kidney, and Flood (2011) suggested that the role of a leader has altered in the last decade. McDermott et al. stated that the role of a leader goes beyond their individual abilities and should include finding a balance for the organization through empowering employees to grow and exceed expectations. McDermott et al. further stated that the role of a leader involved influencing individuals to affect change toward a common goal. If organizational leaders acquire or further understand the demands and role of a leader, they might better understand the strategies needed to overcome barriers that have prevented them from adopting more effective leadership styles.

The best leaders were those who gained the information and talents required to evaluate instances and react properly (Friedman, 2011). Leaders must have directed with a resolve and displayed solid moral behaviors (Wang & Hsieh, 2013). Additionally, leaders must have exuded trust and respect in order to build prosperous relationships (Fairfield, Harmon, & Behson, 2011). The most effective leaders drove their organizations to attain noteworthy business outcomes through appropriate communication among leaders and their employees, which could have created strong relationships and resulted in consumer-focused employees (Friedman, 2011).

Leadership Competency Needed to Implement Organizational Success

Modern leaders need to educate themselves on best leadership practices in order to be successful. For instance, K. Wang, Chiang, and Tung (2012) and Mohd-Shamsudin and Chuttipattana (2012) submitted that if leaders were to be successful, they must implement human resource management activities focused on improving knowledge, skills, abilities in order to gain the genuine support of employees. Additionally, Mohd-Shamsudin and Chuttipattana advised that leaders must embrace and commit their organizations to lifelong learning in order to improve their employee base. In another case, Hoffman et al. (2011) stated that by gaining knowledge on self-awareness, self-management, and self-development, and by acting with integrity, leaders might strengthen their ability to lead and implement organizational effectiveness. Leaders furthering their knowledge and implementing best practices might gain the ability to determine the best strategies for overcoming barriers that prevent them from adopting a more effective leadership style.

According to Rappaport (2011), the current marketplace has had a multitude of prospects and pressures that required a strong leader to handle diverse challenges. Great upcoming leaders found relevant manners to encounter the challenges leaders met before reaching leadership roles. These leaders shared a particular set of competencies which were valuable to share with upcoming leaders at any level (Valentine, 2012). Isolating and articulating these competencies might provide useful data for upcoming leaders striving toward executive level positions (Fink, 2011).

One leadership competency that multiple researchers have found that leaders need for success is the ability to manage change. For example, Bolden (2011), Abebe and Angriawan (2011), and Galuska (2014) have all noted that during organizational change, effective leadership was a competency for ensuring long-term sustainability. Further, Galuska stated that leaders must have encouraged employees to change and adhere to common goals. In addition, Conceicao and Altman (2011), I. Smith (2011), and P. A. C. Smith and Sharicz (2011) stated that leaders who effectively managed organizational change by acclimating rapidly to the new culture might have had a chance of succeeding. Moreover, Warrick (2011) suggested that organizations must change their strategies occasionally to compete in this business environment, and leaders must be competent in effective leadership skills and encourage their employees to embrace the change. When leaders became better agents of change, they fostered employee growth, organizational sustainability, and personal growth.

Jantti and Greenhalgh (2012), Hsiung (2012), and Kalyani and Sahoo (2011) agreed with previous researchers that leadership competencies were necessary for organizational success. These scholars furthered the conversation on needed leadership competencies by suggesting that leaders strengthened their competencies to manage services that help implement organizational success. For instance, Jantti and Greenhalgh stated leaders must better manage (a) self-knowledge, (b) self-confidence, (c) leadership competencies, and (d) leader effectiveness. Furthermore, Jantti and Greenhalgh echoed Hsiung's assertion that in order for leaders to gain knowledge on these services, leaders must study and apply (a) organizational strategy, (b) resource management, (c) communication, (d) collaboration, (e) advocacy, and (f) professionalism. Kalyani and Sahoo advanced the argument by stating that when leaders learned to turn these services into competencies, their ability to move the organization toward success increased.

Organizational leaders must consistently strive to improve their leadership competencies. In order to develop these leadership skills, Allio (2009) suggested five prescriptions for improving leadership: (a) integrity was essential, (b) leadership style that balanced managing with leading, (c) collaboration, (d) adaptation, and (e) constant practice and learning. To promote organizational success, leaders must change the way they operate, and the aforementioned core areas described by Allio allow for that continued improvement process. Moreover, Allio found that as these core areas of concentration became competencies of the leader, organizational success improved.

Banutu-Gomez (2013) and Wilkinson (2013) suggested that to be competent, a leader must learn the appropriate knowledge and mindfulness. Farazmand and Green (2012) found that tracking the growth of employees through harnessing their potential, training them to become the most effective leaders, and providing the opportunities for growth encouraged employees to be effective and remain with the organization. Wilkinson further suggested a key option for increasing competency was a leader's knowledge of handling a variety of different situations in order to set a solid direction for an organization.

Gavrilova and Andreeva (2012) suggested that there were four types of knowledge management available for increasing competency of leaders: (a) factual, (b) procedural, (c) conceptual, and (d) self. Gavrilova and Andreeva stated that utilizing these four types of knowledge management allowed leaders to think and operate more strategically. Gavrilova and Andreeva further stated that this strategic thinking might increase organizational development and performance. Vlachos et al. (2013) and Al-Ghazawi (2012) stated that investing in human capital had great returns, and suggested that organizations which participate in programs that develop their employees increased the competencies of their leaders.

Mayer, Aquino, Greenbaum, and Kuenzi (2012) acknowledged that four competencies in leadership were present in successful leaders: (a) self-belief, (b) goals, (c) self-evaluation, and (d) self-regulation. Mayer et al. further stated that self-belief is a set of mental processes that leaders utilize to control events, planning, and behaviors. Webb, Sheeran, and Gollwitzer (2012) suggested that leaders who helped define all aspects of goals for employees were among the best in their field. DeWall, Baumeister, Mead, and Vohs (2011) described self-evaluations as an appraisal of peoples' aptitudes. DeWall et al. proposed such assessments as Myers Briggs and 360-degree feedback to help leaders with these appraisals. Walumbwa, Luthans, Avey, and Oke (2011) defined self-regulation as the examination of personal views, and strategies required to attain success.

Webb et al. (2012) defined goals as comprised of *when*, *where*, and *how* aspects. Webb et al. stated that the pursuit of goals helped a leader to prepare, collect, and analyze data regarding problems so that a determination of solutions might occur. Additionally, Webb et al. suggested that the pursuit of goals helped leaders attain more resilient responses from employees through improved employee outlooks, surges in commitment, and lowered doubt.

DeWall et al. (2011) categorized self-evaluations as a necessary procedure between leaders and their experiences. DeWall et al. described these self-evaluations as a leader's primary assessment of their worth and ability to lead employees to productivity. DeWall et al. described self-evaluations as a significant and positive competency for leaders to have to best lead employees. Thus, self-evaluations demonstrated how leaders approached their careers and how they positively approached employees.

Walumbwa et al. (2011) suggested that self-regulation was the exploration of views, preparations, and activities required for leaders to best assist employees toward effectiveness. According to Walumbwa et al., the best leaders selected the self-regulating processes to reach their chosen goals consistently. As a result, Walumbwa et al. noted that successful leaders self–regulated to have their organizations perform at an optimum level.

Transformational Leadership

Researchers have studied copious theories about leadership styles over the past 30 years and categorized each unique approach, characteristic, or behavior (Chi et al., 2012). Moreover, Sahin et al. (2014), Belias and Koustelios (2014), and Li and Hung (2009) stated that one of the most effective of these leadership styles was transformational leadership. Sahin et al., Belias and Koustelios, and Li and Hung further stated that transformational leadership behaviors were more likely to induce employee engagement through leadership behaviors.

Sahin et al. (2014) specified that transformational leadership had five dimensions that induced engagement in employees: (a) idealized influence attributed to the leader by employees, (b) idealized influence based on the leader’s behavior, (c) intellectual stimulation, (d) inspirational motivation, and (e) individualized consideration. Sahin et al. explained that when these behaviors existed, satisfaction of employees occurred, which might have lead to performance beyond traditional expectations. As depicted by Kuepers (2011), leaders who exhibited a transformational leadership style became agents of change within an organization because they were transforming the vision of the organization through empowering their employees to make change happen. If leaders could be agents of change, they might better have addressed the strategies to overcome barriers that prevented adoption of a more effective leadership style.

Belias and Koustelios (2014) stated that transformational leadership occurred when a leader had instinctive skills and flair that came naturally. Chi et al. (2012) suggested that this flair was charisma and was a fundamental ingredient in being a transformational leader. Charisma was the ability to produce an influence, which happened when employees distinguished that a leader had extraordinary abilities (Effelsberg, Solga, & Gurt, 2014; Hur, van den Berg, & Wilderom, 2011). This view originated from transformational leaders being traditionally excellent communicators by conveying the vision of the company.

Transformational leaders were trustworthy and reliable, and employees believed the leader was the best solution to the organizational issues (Farahani et al., 2011). Transformational leaders were smart and inspired the employees of the organization to find several ways to solve problems. Galuska (2014) said that the leader's aptitude was cerebral, which gave the leader the ability to solve problems and empathize with the employee. Transformational leaders addressed the needs of the organization by (a) aligning employees, (b) providing a direction, (c) motivating employees, (d) stimulating and invigorating employees, (e) leading with integrity, and (f) expecting and managing change.

Lin and Hsiao (2014) studied the connection between transformational leaders and change on an organizational level. Lin and Hsiao suggested that leadership behaviors that accentuated change were imperative for transformational leaders to have when a company experienced organizational change. Lin and Hsiao listed these leadership behaviors: (a) communication, (b) preparation, (c) sensitivity, (d) trust, (e) effectiveness, (f) motivation, and (g) personalized consideration. Lin and Hsiao further suggested communication, preparation, and sensitivity were the key leadership behaviors needed for organizational change.

Lin and Hsiao (2014) also found a relationship between behaviors of strong leaders of organizational change and transformational leaders within three transformational leadership behaviors. These behaviors were (a) sensitivity, (b) motivation, and (c) personalized consideration. Lin and Hsiao defined sensitivity as the level that a leader achieved to connect with the employees, and thus the employees trusted the leader and connected to the leader’s vision. Lin and Hsiao stated that motivation was the level to which a leader could produce creativity from employees to solve organizational problems. Finally, Lin and Hsiao identified that personalized consideration was the degree in which a leader communicated with the employees through mentoring and identifying the unique traits that each employee brought to the organization.

Employee engagement. Employee engagement has often been a byproduct of great leadership behaviors (Xu & Thomas, 2011). Employee engagement was a mutual bond between employees and employers, motivating employees to repay their employers through engagement (Anaza & Rutherford, 2012; Farahani et al., 2011; Wang & Howell, 2012). Anaza and Rutherford (2012) and Farahani et al. (2011) stated if an employee received emotional support or special financial assistance from their employer, the employee felt indebted to repay their employer through more engagement-like behaviors.

Employee engagement was an encouraging, fulfilling, job-related emotional feeling where employees displayed vitality, commitment, and attachment (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, & Ilies, 2012). Engagement positively related with an employee’s capacity to adjust and attain efficiency at work (Chalofsky & Cavallaro, 2013). The sense of attachment was the foundation that joined employees to the organization and cities which they served (Abraham, 2012). Additionally, employee engagement improved a company’s reputation (Lu & Gursoy, 2013).

Engaged employees were fervent and dedicated (Burke & Attridge, 2011; Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2013). These engaged employees attached themselves to their position and found meaning by demonstrating positive values and loyalty to their company (Lacy, Haines, & Hayward, 2012). Engagement was a positive driver toward a more productive employee base and generated great value for the company (Abraham, 2012; Chalofsky & Cavallaro, 2013; Schneider et al., 2013). Additionally, once engagement occurred, leaders noticed an increase productivity and output.

If organizations benefited from employee engagement behaviors, leaders should have strived to develop these behaviors. Three conditions, as described by Snell (2009), improved employee engagement: (a) onboarding the right people, (b) driving internal mobility, and (c) improving the ability of leaders to manage. Snell stated that employees tended to engage more with their work when their employer offered the ability to make their own decisions, career planning, and feedback. Furthermore, Christian, Garza, and Slaughter (2011) identified that task significance was a noteworthy forecaster of engagement, and when organizational leaders provided important challenges that captivated employees, employee engagement might have occurred.

Xanthopoulou et al. (2012) stated that an employee's level of engagement came from multiple positive dealings and open communication. Peterson, Luthans, Avolio, Walumbwa, and Zhang (2011) suggested that positive communications produced encouraging organizational change. Additionally, Chalofsky and Cavallaro (2013) established that to move employees toward engagement, an organizational culture must have encouraged employees not to separate their feelings of work from self and community.

Mishra, Boynton, and Mishra (2014) stated that a positive interaction with employees and their leaders might have filled the space between a disengaged or engaged workplace, which might have increased optimism and productivity. Friedman (2011) suggested that only when employees felt this engagement would they follow the leader's direction in its entirety. Bello (2012) suggested that engaged employees best utilized their talents and could positively impact organizational change. When leaders openly produced engaged employees, these organizations became vigorous and completed establishments whose leaders respected employee wellbeing (Midttun, Gjølberg, Kourula, Sweet, & Vallentin, 2012). Further, when leaders engaged employees in discussions of planned changes and how the change might have affected the employee, an engaged atmosphere was likely to occur (Andrew & Sofian, 2012).

Other characteristics of engagement focused on planning strategies, such as upward mobility and stimulating work and opportunities to have a healthy work-life balance (Fairfield et al., 2011). Bello (2012) stated that resolving any conflict between employees and leaders was also very important to engage employees. Organizational leaders who could harness workplace optimism allowed employees to commit to their organizations better than any other way, which bred employee engagement (Kool & van Dierendonck, 2012).

Certain factors, such as burnout, have negatively affected engagement. Hu and Schaufeli (2011) explained that burnout eroded engagement of the employee with their organization. Burnout was a psychological reaction to long-term organizational environments, and Hu and Schaufeli suggested that burnout countered engagement through stressors in job demands not addressed by leadership. According to Hu and Schaufeli, finding the appropriate balance of arbitration of job demands and motivation processes drove employees to engagement rather than burnout.

Lu and Gursoy (2013) stated disengaged individuals lack energy and originality. Lu and Gursoy further suggested that the lack of these attributes often eroded a company from the inside out. Chalofsky and Cavallaro (2013) stated that disengagement behaviors included employee negativity, pessimism, hopelessness, and apathy. Further damage came from these employees transferring these feelings of gloom to their personal lives. These negative outlooks and behaviors might have encumbered any constructive change (Kassing, Piemonte, Goman, & Mitchell, 2012).

A by-product of disengagement was lateral dissent (Christian et al., 2011). Lateral dissent happened when disengaged employees discussed their contradictory opinions with fellow employees. Many leaders considered lateral dissent confrontational, and the act of participating in this action often threatened employees’ jobs. Thus, disengaged employees must have determined whether articulating their concerns in this type of malicious manner was a smart career move (Schneider et al., 2013).

Leaders needed to recognize that some actions might have elicited disengagement behaviors such as pessimism and suspicion (Shuck & Herd, 2012). Through these actions, leaders must have found ways to implement engagement behaviors, especially during restructuring or reducing jobs (Abraham, 2012). If leaders could repair areas of poor communication, excess work, and any alleged discriminatory benefits, disengagement might have improved (Chiaburu, Diaz, & De Vos, 2013). Further, Kassing et al. (2012) stated those leaders who installed strategies that reestablished their employees’ optimism and need in the company turned disengagement to engagement behaviors.

According to Randeree and Chaudhry (2012), another approach to counter the negative effects on employee engagement was acknowledgement of employee job satisfaction. Six practices to bolster job satisfaction were (a) salary, (b) nature of the job, (c) flexibility, (d) security, (e) direct supervisor behavior, and (f) organization leadership

(Randeree & Chaudhry, 2012). When leaders seriously addressed these practices, employee engagement occurred and organizational performance might have increased (Randeree & Chaudhry, 2012).

Leaders recognizing the importance of employee commitment drove engagement behaviors (Darabi & Clark, 2012). Furthermore, Darabi and Clark (2012) stated a key to success with engaging employees was the importance of leadership ranging from the employees' direct supervisor through the highest executive pushing engagement behaviors. In order to maximize employee engagement, Darabi and Clark suggested leaders should have utilized six leadership practices to drive employee engagement: (a) internal promotion, (b) employee training opportunities, (c) involving employees in decision-making, (d) providing fair performance evaluations, (e) reward employees for excellent performance, and (f) providing a healthy work-life balance.

Kang, Stewart, and Kim (2011) suggested that organizational commitment created an environment in which engagement succeeded. Meyer, Stanley, and Parfyonova (2011) stated that when organizational commitment toward engagement occurred, employees demonstrated three components: (a) affective commitment; (b) continuance commitment; and (c) normative commitment. Meyer et al. stated that employees must have demonstrated all three components to be productive for an organization.

The first step toward engagement for employees was affective commitment, which was the emotional connection that employees felt for their company's culture (Meyer et al., 2011). Affective commitment was organizationally significant because it concerned an employee's own commitment to remain with an organization (Carleton, 2011). The commitment to an organization was the first hurdle of an employee when employees have determined to commit their talents to a company (Carleton, 2011).

The second step toward engagement for employees was continuance commitment, which was the price of preserving employment (Lin & Wang, 2012). C. Lin and Wang (2012) suggested that the cost of departing from a company had a role in whether employees selected to remain with their company. Continuance commitment fashioned an opening for employees to feel engagement with their occupation and become value added to their company (Lambert, Kelley, & Hogan, 2013). Carleton (2011) stated that the both the employee and the organization needed to balance the risks of leaving the company over the benefits of remaining within the company.

The third step, the normative commitment, was the internalization of forces that an employee sensed before arriving at a company (Kang et al., 2011). These forces that affected employees' commitment attitudes might have helped to motivate employees and increased engagement (Kang et al., 2011). Additionally, these forces could have increased productivity and effectiveness through the increased engagement (Meyer et al., 2011).

Finally, Farndale, Van Ruiten, Kelliher, and Hope-Hailey (2011) suggested the keys to employee engagement were perception of employee voice, direct supervisor relationship, and trust in executive leadership. The interconnection of these three factors submitted by Farndale et al. demonstrated how positive employee voice might occur when the direct supervisor relationship and trust in executive leadership were high. Through proper communication between employees and leaders, the three elements stated by Farndale et al. elicited high employee engagement.

Resonance. According to Goleman et al. (2002), resonance referred to a climate induced by leaders through being in tune with their employees' feelings and guiding them in an encouraging fashion while the leaders spoke honestly about their principles and strategies and encourage the same from their employees. Additionally, Goleman et al. and Ghamrawi (2013) suggested once resonance occurred, leaders and employees could articulate a shared mission, which encouraged one another to greater levels of success. Ahn, Ettner, and Loupin (2012) indicated resonance portrayed by leaders contained eight core values: (a) integrity, (b) good judgment, (c) leadership by example, (d) decision making, (e) trust, (f) fairness, (g) humility, and (h) sense of urgency. These values of resonance created a multiplying effect throughout an organization, and Ahn et al. stated that these values could have meaningfully strengthened culture and unity and boosted productivity.

Finally, Goleman et al. (2002) stated that resonance occurred when leaders were cognizant of others' feelings and guided them in an inspiring direct fashion. Six leadership methods proposed by Goleman et al. further defined resonance: (a) visionary resonance, (b) coaching resonance, (c) affiliative resonance, (d) democratic resonance, (e) pacesetting resonance, and (f) commanding resonance. Additionally, these six varieties of resonance were aligned with certain aspects of transformational leadership behaviors (Goleman et al., 2002).

Visionary resonance. Yoeli and Berkovich (2010) stated that visionary resonant leaders articulated and motivated employees to a shared vision through such prominent factors as (a) identity, (b) culture, (c) professional experience, and (d) values. Additionally, Thoonen, Sleegers, Oort, Peetsma, and Geijsel (2011) suggested that visionary resonant leaders utilized motivational factors to mediate environmental conditions and stimulate learning, which ultimately improved conditions. Similarly, Goleman et al. (2002) stated the characteristics of a leader demonstrating visionary resonance were (a) the ability to inspire, (b) belief in own vision, (c) empathy, and (d) the ability to explain how employees' efforts contribute to the vision. Therefore, leaders built visionary resonance through moving employees toward shared organizational visions. Thus, visionary resonant leaders were most appropriate when organizations required a new vision or direction (Goleman et al., 2002).

Coaching resonance. Leaders demonstrated coaching resonance by participating in training discussions (Baron & Morin, 2009). These discussions were an opportunity to have sincere personal relationships about the employees' professional performance and personal satisfaction (Baron & Morin, 2009). When these discussions and relationships occurred, they succeeded because of these factors: (a) self-efficacy, and (b) working alliance or trust (Baron & Morin, 2009). Goleman et al. (2002) stated the characteristics of a leader establishing coaching resonance were the abilities (a) to listen, (b) to help employees identify their strengths and weaknesses, (c) to encourage, and (d) to delegate. These characteristics led Goleman et al. to suggest that leaders built coaching resonance through aligning what employees wanted with organizational goals.

Affiliative resonance. According to Godbee (2012), leaders who built affiliative resonance established associations that allowed employees to make connections that allowed for growth and advancement. Goleman et al. (2002) stated the characteristics of a leader establishing affiliative resonance were (a) promoting harmony, (b) boosting morale, and (c) solving conflicts. Leaders built affiliative resonance by generating harmony through connecting employees together with other employees and leaders, and Goleman et al. suggested the best utilization by leaders during stressful times was affiliative resonance behaviors to mitigate a tense environment.

Democratic resonance. Raelin (2012) and Long (2012) found leaders needing to ensure a participatory organizational change should have established democratic resonance as their primary form of leadership. In more detail, Raelin stated that democratic resonance characterized how leaders and employees communicated through a deliberation process, which involved employees and leaders collaboratively working toward solutions. Similarly, Goleman et al. (2002) proposed leaders build democratic resonance through valuing employees' input and commitment through participation. More specifically, Goleman et al. stated the characteristics of a leader establishing democratic resonance were (a) excellent listening, (b) teamwork, (c) collaboration, and (d) influence. Utilization of democratic resonance was best when organizations wanted employee input to solve challenges (Goleman et al., 2002).

Pacesetting resonance. According to Goleman et al. (2002), characteristics of a leader establishing pacesetting resonance were a strong drive to excel, high standards, impatience, and micromanaging. Additionally, Goleman et al. stated leaders built pacesetting resonance through accomplishing perplexing and stimulating goals. Pacesetting and resonant leaders were at their most effective when they garnered high-level results from a motivated group of employees, but should have used this ability periodically to manage the law of diminishing returns (Goleman et al., 2002).

Commanding resonance. Commanding resonance had four characteristics according to Goleman et al. (2002). More specifically, these commanding resonance characteristics were (a) demanding immediate compliance, (b) threatening, (c) tightening control, and (d) driving talent away. These characteristics might have turned around a crisis quickly, but leaders must have utilized this skill occasionally or risk employee burnout (Goleman et al., 2002).

In conclusion, Goleman et al. (2002) explained that the most effective leaders expertly shifted between all six styles depending on the organizational situation, never relying on just one style. Specifically, four of the six styles influenced organizational climate in a positive manner. These four positive styles were visionary, coaching, affiliative, and democratic (Goleman et al., 2002). Additionally, Goleman et al. suggested that the remaining two styles, pacesetting and commanding, affected organizational climate in a negative manner and created dissonance. Goleman et al. contended that the dissonance created from the two negative styles produced emotional distance between the leaders and employees, which conflicted with transformational leadership practices.

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leaders demonstrated their expectations to their employees and the level of productivity required to attain those expectations (Chaudhry & Javed, 2012). Transactional leadership has had two distinct forms. The first form was constructive, which involved leaders instructing individuals or groups, providing resources for completion of certain jobs, determining employees' competences, and providing certain types of reward for successful conclusion of the jobs (Bello, 2012). The second form was corrective, which emphased setting values (Bello, 2012). This form was very involved, whereby the leaders observed their employees thoroughly for mistakes, or waited for mistakes to arise before reacting.

Transactional leaders set up and outlined contracts that realized specific purposes. These leaders did this through creating nice work environments, and providing a variety of rewarding the employees for positive actions (Bolden, 2011). According to Cameron (2011), transactional leaders avoided deep involvement with their employees, and only engaged their employees to utilize resources to get the tasks completed. Chaudhry and Javed (2012) stated that transactional leadership was often received positively from employees and motivated employees to reach their organizational goals.

Laissez-faire Leadership

Laissez-faire leaders were passive with their style of leadership (Hsiung, 2012). Leaders utilizing a laissez-faire leadership style often evaded problems, did not embrace problem solving, delayed with decision making, and did not discuss employees' performance issues (Kalyani & Sahoo, 2011). These actions result in the thought that laissez-faire leadership was an unsuccessful or lazy leadership style (Effelsberg et al., 2014). Often leaders avoided the perception of being micromanagers, but leadership avoidance has had even worse costs for organizations (Galuska, 2014). Laissez-faire leaders often bred ambiguity and offered little direction to their employees.

Kempster et al. (2011) stated that situations existed when laissez-faire leadership might be effective. For example, when a leading a group of driven individuals and the leader was confident that based on prior performance that his team will get the job done. Laissez-faire leaders might have delegated to others in acute situations, so that organizational effectiveness occurred (Lopez, Green, Carmody-Bubb, & Kodatt, 2011).

Leadership Challenges

Many previous researchers (e.g. Kelly & Finkelman, 2011; Krizek, Newport, White, & Townsend, 2012; Madsen & Mabokela, 2014; Viinamäki, 2012) proposed that leaders encountered multiple challenges that prevented them from reaching the highest level of effectiveness. For instance, Viinamäki (2012) stated two of these challenges were leaders overcoming their own errors and consequences of employee disengagement. Additionally, Morison and McMullan (2013) and Ehrenhard, Muntslag, and Wilderom (2012) suggested that some of the challenges commonly faced by organizations when attempting to achieve an objective were lack of strategic focus, strategic awareness, lack of the benefits of the objective, and lack of commitment from leadership. These challenges provided unique sets of conditions for leaders to reconcile (Krizek et al., 2012; Madsen & Mabokela, 2014). The process of reconciliation of each challenge altered an organization, and a leader's ability to handle these challenges directly affected organizational culture and effectiveness, which influenced engagement (Krizek et al., 2012; Viinamäki, 2012).

Common leadership errors. Maurer (2011) stated that leaders made four major mistakes that kept their organization from adjusting to the marketplace and aspiring to top efficiency and effectiveness. These mistakes were (a) assuming that comprehension equals backing and dedication, (b) misjudging the potential strength of employee engagement, (c) neglecting to realize the strength of fear, and (d) neglecting to recognize how even a small shortage of trust and confidence between employees and leaders can destroy an otherwise great initiative. Maurer posited that employees traditionally did not ask the hard questions to leaders about initiatives. Rather, employees attempted to (a) avoid these questions, (b) reduced their remarks, and (c) submitted only tame questions. Maurer contended that these actions from employees mislead leaders to believe that interest with this initiative existed, and thus assumed that employee comprehension equaled backing and dedication of the initiative.

Leaders often charged employees with seizing opportunities and instructed their employees the exact next steps in order to garner the opportunity (Maurer, 2011). When leaders instructed employees with the exact next steps, there was no place for the employees to influence the manner the organization approached the opportunity. Maurer (2011) suggested this approach eroded employee engagement and might make the opportunity less than its potential. This misjudgment on the potential engagement of employees might have lowered productivity and rendered a lower morale among the employees.

Additionally, leaders neglecting to realize the strength of employees' fear regarding changes that affected them might have paralyzed an organization (Maurer, 2011). Some leaders simply assumed that over time, employees would have accepted changes, but during that time, efficiency was substantially lower (Maurer, 2011).

Similarly, Suleiman (2013) and Meredith (2013) suggested that some leaders aimed for only short term outcomes, and the introduction of a more lasting change could have confuse employees and might have increased fear among employees, thus increasing the rate of failure with implementing change. When leaders realized the power fear played in employees' lives and actively attempted to mitigate those fears productivity might have trended higher.

Finally, Maurer (2011) claimed that there were many great concepts formulated every day, yet some leaders neglected to recognize how a shortage of trust and confidence between employees and leaders could destroy these great ideas. If employees did not trust their leaders, they would not follow the leader. This applied to everyday operations or new ideas. Maurer suggested that ensuring trust between employees and leaders allowed for better development and growth of the concept, because employees and leaders must have understood that each of them needed to trust to reach the common goal.

Consequences of employee disengagement. Disengaged employees did not invest themselves fully into their organizations (Inoue et al., 2013). Additionally, Inoue et al. (2013) contended that disengaged employees lacked in task performance and organizational social responsibility behavior. More specifically, Bello (2012) and Malik (2013) suggested that employees disengaged when a lack of trust occurred with management, through abusing organizational norms to their benefit, which took value from the organization, and a poor match between leadership style and the organization.

Addressing these factors mitigated disengagement and hampered counterproductive behaviors, which might have led to other employees disengaging (Malik, 2013).

Meyer et al. (2011) stated that the deeds of disengaged employees have had a negative effect on efficiency and effectiveness in the workplace. Meyer et al. discussed that the positive aspects of engagement were very helpful to an organization, but the consequences of having a disengaged workforce might have crippled an organization. Through reducing disengaged employees, productivity might have increased and profitability of companies (Meyer et al., 2011).

Dismissing or discounting the effect of disengaged employees might have affected morale and eroded a productive workforce (Bello, 2012). Moreover, Gruman and Saks (2011) and Xu and Thomas (2011) contended that disengaged employees lead to turnover costs, lower retention rates, and poor morale. Poor morale deeply affected organizational performance, and, according to Lopez et al. (2011) and Mills, Culbertson, and Fullager (2012), disengaged employees felt emotionally exhausted, which in turn has had negative consequences throughout all aspects of organizational performance.

Theory of Leadership Styles and Expectancy Theory

Goleman et al. (2002) endorsed the leadership styles theory in the 2002 book, *Primal Leadership*. Goleman et al. stated that to understand better the leadership styles theory, comprehension of the concept of resonance within leadership must have occurred. Goleman et al. suggested that leaders expressed their personal preferences for leading through choosing six approaches to improving their organization.

The leaders who chose to express their personal feelings were those who were in tune with others' states of mind and led them in a positive manner. These six approaches utilizing resonance were (a) visionary, (b) coaching, (c) affiliative, (d) democratic, (e) pacesetting, and (f) commanding (Goleman et al., 2002). Goleman et al. (2002) concluded these six areas aligned with a transformational leadership style. Further, identifying the strategies to overcoming barriers to achieving resonance within any of the six approaches might have addressed the research question of this current study.

Goleman et al. (2002) further noted that when leaders reach resonance through utilizing these approaches, employees established a symbiotic comfort with the leader. Goleman et al. concluded the six areas aligned with transformational leadership practices. Identifying the strategies to overcome barriers to reaching resonance in any of the six areas might have addressed the research question, and consequently, results of this research might have indicated what strategies small business leaders used to improve workplace engagement.

Vroom and Deci (1970) suggested through the expectancy theory that a person's behavior resulted from selections from an assortment of choices, which increased pleasure and decreased discomfort. Vroom and Deci stated that, through the expectancy theory, (a) there was a positive association between a person's effort and performance, (b) solid performance resulted in a positive return, (c) the return satisfied a person's need, and (d) the longing to satisfy the person's need made the effort worthwhile. The main views of the expectancy theory were valence and expectancy.

Valence referred to the emotional responses people have with respect to the outcome (Vroom & Deci, 1970). Expectancy referred to a person's varied stages of confidence on their capabilities (Vroom & Deci, 1970). Within the expectancy theory, management must have discovered what employees valued and the resources or training employees needed to succeed.

The theory of leadership styles related to this study's research question with regard to understanding the concept of employee engagement through resonance. When small business leaders reached resonance, these leaders removed the lack of understanding engagement as a barrier. Goleman et al. (2002) stated that employees became engaged when their leaders were resonant. Resonance from leaders elicited excitement from employees to become more actively involved and ultimately engaged within their organization. Once leaders established resonance as a new part of their leadership behavior, employees might have easily participated in engagement behaviors.

Expectancy theory (Vroom & Deci, 1970) aligned with this study's focus with regard to employees' choices to participate in engagement behaviors. The main tenets of expectancy theory were valence and expectancy. Both tenets aligned with employee engagement through employee confidence of their capabilities and their emotional reactions to certain outcomes (Vroom & Deci, 1970). When managers addressed the strategies to overcome barriers from realizing employee engagement, organizations might have experienced positive valence or emotional reactions and an increase in expectancy or employees' confidence. Both positive valence and an increase in expectancy were key drivers to employee engagement.

Transition and Summary

Section 1 of this proposal included the concepts, concerns, and obstacles relating to the business problem that prompted this study. The purpose of this doctoral study was to explore strategies small business leaders used to develop to minimize the barriers to adopting an effective leadership style to improve organizational workplace engagement. The research question guiding this doctoral study was, What strategies do small business leaders use to improve organizational workplace engagement? The main topics within the literature review were (a) the definition and role of a leader, (b) leadership competency to implement organizational success, (c) transformational leadership concerning employee engagement and resonance, and (d) leadership challenges concerning leadership errors and consequences of employee disengagement. The conclusions of the literature review indicated a need for further study of the strategies and identification of what barriers prevented small business leaders from adopting a more effective leadership style to improve workplace engagement.

The intent for this doctoral study was to explore the strategies small business leaders used to develop an effective leadership style to improve workplace engagement. To explore this topic, I interviewed a purposive sample of 20 of the highest-ranking executives within their organization with between 50 and 250 employees. These participants worked at organizations that operated within the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, had worked in their position for at least 1 year, and worked at an organization where an attempt to implement a leadership style change occurred within the last 5 years.

The focus for this study was to explore the highest-ranking executives' perceptions of the strategies to overcome barriers that small business leaders faced to developing an effective leadership style to improve workplace engagement. The data from this study might contribute to new insights and possibly provide financial savings to organizations represented in this purposive sample. The social change impact was the potential to influence business practice through positive progress on the ideal that bureaucratization shifted from impersonal judgment and miscommunication by means of engaging employees in commitment behaviors. This might benefit employees' outlook on their future at their respective organizations, which may resonate within their families and communities.

Section 2 has the following specifications addressed (a) the role of the researcher, (b) participants, (c) methodology, (d) design, (e) population and sample, (f) ethical adherence, (g) data collection, (h) collection technique, (i) analysis, (j) reliability and validity instruments utilized, and (k) a transition into Section 3. Section 3 begins with (a) the purpose of the study, (b) restating of the research question, (c) a presentation of the findings, (d) application to the real world setting, (e) implications of social change, (f) recommendations for action, (g) any recommendations for future study, (h) reflections, and (i) a take-home message.

Section 2: The Project

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore strategies small business leaders used to develop effective leadership styles to improve workplace engagement. The purpose of Section 2 is to outline this study’s (a) research design, (b) design appropriateness, (c) data analysis techniques, (d) sampling, (e) data collection (f) procedures and rationale, (g) population, and (h) internal and external validity. The findings of this research might influence business practice through leader implementation of more effective leadership characteristics within their organizations, which could improve employee engagement and organizational effectiveness.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore strategies small business leaders used to develop effective leadership styles to improve workplace engagement. The geographic boundaries of this study were in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States and included Winston-Salem, North Carolina and Greensboro, North Carolina. The target population was the highest-ranking executives at small businesses in the Mid-Atlantic region with between 50 and 250 employees.

According to Jantti and Greenhalgh (2012), many organizations do not have leaders who understand how to incorporate effective plans to inspire staff toward engagement and commitment. The data from this study might contribute to new leadership insights and possibly provide effective and efficient improvements for organizations represented in this purposive sample. The ultimate contribution to social change was movement toward a more effective leadership style that might encourage positive progress on the ideal that bureaucratization shifted from impersonal judgment and miscommunication by means of engaging employees in commitment behaviors. This shift might benefit employees as they change outlook on their future at their respective organizations, which may resonate within their families and communities.

Role of the Researcher

In this qualitative descriptive research, the participants and I were joint investigators seeking new information. We thus had to attempt to put aside any biases (Marshall & Rossman, 2011), and joint investigation helped to prevent contamination of the research data. Here I provide a full account of my experiences regarding this research for future researchers and reviewers of this study, which adds to the study's transparency and thereby the assurance of its reliability. I took notes and transcribed the interviews of the participants' experiences as part of the exploration of their behaviors. I utilized an interview process (Appendix A) to ensure (a) that others might replicate the interview procedures in future research; (b) comfort, privacy, and confidentiality for the participants; and (c) mitigation of any disadvantages from personal bias.

I am familiar my research topic because I have worked at several organizations where leadership styles failed which resulted in the continuation of ineffective engagement. I noticed confusion from leaders when their leadership style failed, which resulted in ineffective engagement. Additionally, I listened to the employees of these leaders articulate why the leadership style change did not elicit effective engagement. I have lived and worked in the geographical area where this study occurred and I have experienced many leadership styles. My familiarity with the topic and area where the study occurred might have made the participants feel more comfortable with sharing their experiences with barriers that may have prevented them from adopting more effective leadership styles and the strategies they have used to address these barriers in order to improve workplace engagement.

I utilized the systematic approach described by Bleijenbergh et al. (2011) to diminish bias in my purposive sampling, analysis, and data collection. To help mitigate my personal bias, I utilized bracketing. Moustakas (1994) has noted that bracketing is a process that a researcher utilizes to recognize and avoid biases from tainting the data collection and data analysis processes. Moustakas further stated that bracketing serves as a method of validating a qualitative study through the act of suspending judgment about the world to focus specifically on the analysis of the research.

I encouraged complete and rich responses from the participants about their firsthand experiences. Participants described their experience of these behaviors by responding to open-ended questions which allowed for comprehensive answers rather than a simple *yes* or *no*. To ensure appropriate and ethical research for this study, I followed protocol presented in the Belmont Report, a prominent work that summarizes the ethical philosophies and protocol for researching human subjects. The ethical principles and responsibilities for researchers are (a) respect for individuals, defending an individual's independence and providing individuals with respect through informed consent; (b) beneficence, capitalizing on the individual's responses to benefit the study while doing no harm to the participants; and (c) justice, realistic and honestly administered procedures (Cameron, 2011). Applying these principles necessitated conscious contemplation of (a) informed consent, (b) risks benefit assessment, and (c) selection of participants for research (Hsiung, 2012).

Participants

Safdar and Dupuis (2011) suggested that within the qualitative descriptive approach, researchers should purposefully choose a sample of interviewees who have had a stake in the outcomes of the research. This process allowed participants in my study to provide alignment, understanding, and familiarity with the research topic. I used purposive sampling within the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States to identify appropriate organizations for this study (Safdar & Dupuis, 2011).

To gain access to qualified and interested participants, I reached out to the Executive Directors of the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, and the Mid-Atlantic Area Leader’s Society (MEALS) and asked them to contact their active membership base to help me build research relationships. Rao (2012) stated that with the potential interviewees coming from a purposefully sampled group, their contribution and knowledge will assist the overall research and its discoveries. I attempted to use this contact to link participant’s interests with my study’s potential social impact, and made clear that my research might result in deepening knowledge about strategies for overcoming barriers to a more effective leadership style. I gained access to interested participants through the following steps.

Steps to Engage Potential Participants

1. I involved the Executive Directors from the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, and

MEALS since they had the most updated contact information for the small business leaders in this area.

2. The Executive Directors emailed my organizational invitation letter to the highest-ranking executives at small businesses within the whole membership base that qualified for this study, asking them to respond to me directly using the contact information I provided in the organizational invitation letter.
3. Once the highest-ranking executive responded to the organizational invitation letter, I emailed the invitation and consent form to them for review and signature.
4. I moved forward with the interviews as soon as I received the necessary consent forms.
5. I reached out via email to each participant and mutually determined the timing and best place for the interview to occur that allowed for utmost privacy.
6. I greeted the participant at the pre-determined location and time and answered any questions that the participant might have had before the interview began.
7. I began the audio recording and started with the first interview question.
8. At the end of the interview, I thanked the participant and forwarded a summary of the results to them once they have been transcribed.

Access to participants came from professional networking within my membership access to (a) Mid-Atlantic Executive Area Leaders (MEALS), (b) Rotary clubs, and (c) Chamber of Commerce. Rao (2012) stated that with the potential interviewees coming from a purposefully sampled group, their contribution and knowledge assisted the overall research and its discoveries.

I delimited participation by eliminating nonprofit organizations for consideration in this study and including only for-profit- organizations with between 50 and 250 employees. Further, I limited the location of the participant organizations to the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Participants in the potential sampling frame included the highest-ranking executive of organizations in Winston-Salem and Greensboro, North Carolina who completed the demographic information, and were willing to discuss their views on the research topic. This sample engaged a wide array of highest-ranking executives that served diverse business segments. To facilitate applicability to a wide sector of business, I made every attempt to include a variety of small business categories.

Additionally, I limited participants to those who were in their position for at least 1 year and who knowingly instigated an organizational change to elicit effective engagement. I selected all those willing to participate until data saturation was met (Trotter, 2012), and sent each potential participant an invitation letter to participate in the study (see Appendix B).

In addition, I requested that each participant sign a consent form. A copy of the consent form is in Appendix B. Each chosen participant acknowledged their willingness to contribute by signing the consent form. In an attempt to build an initial rapport with participants, I met with each participant privately and explained what I was doing, made sure they understood, felt unthreatened, and moved forward if they agreed.

Research Method and Design

There are three methodologies appropriate for a doctoral study: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Bernard, 2013). I considered of all three methodologies during the proposal stage of my research. I chose a qualitative methodology because the goal of this study was to better comprehend the varied and lived experiences of the participants and how their experiences related to the research question.

The goal of qualitative methodology is to expand knowledge through an understanding of shared experiences (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). My specific intent for this qualitative research proposal was to explore strategies small business leaders used to identify and address the barriers to adopting an effective leadership style to improve workplace engagement. Interviewing the highest-ranking executives provided the rich textural data necessary to address the research problem. Thus, qualitative research with the descriptive design provided a suitable methodology and design to answer the research question.

Method

Cole et al. (2011) have noted that the research methodology sets the groundwork for the study and the manner for formulating and articulating the outcomes and conclusions. Birkinshaw, Brannen, and Tung (2011) suggested that the objective for qualitative methods was to gain comprehension of the topic investigated and discuss any conditions that might arise. I selected the qualitative method over quantitative methods because I sought to explore new information and specific circumstances.

I used open-ended interview questions to help derive suggestions for organizations’ leaders. These suggestions resonated with the study’s purpose of exploring strategies small business leaders have used address and minimize barriers to adopting an effective leadership style to improve workplace engagement. O’Kane and Cunningham

(2013) noted that a strong motive for selecting a qualitative method was that qualitative researchers might acquire a more timely response than researchers utilizing quantitative research designs. Another reason I selected qualitative research was that qualitative datum consisted of rich textural information that could provide depth and breadth to address the research question (Hurt & McLaughlin, 2012).

As suggested by Bernard (2013), the utilization of qualitative research with this study allowed significant responses to stand out in those organizations where leaders failed or succeeded in the implementation of a more effective leadership style that (a) addressed workplace engagement and (b) led to rich textural data rather than numeric data that lack depth or breadth. Additionally, the utilization of the qualitative approach for this study allowed the leaders to implement new practices to improve employees' engagement and improve organizational performance. The qualitative method aligned well with the leadership styles and expectancy theories, because these theories required rich and textural descriptions to respond to the theories. These textural and descriptive responses may have assisted in determining the appropriate choice of leadership style to elicit effective workplace performance, productivity, profitability, and the managers' ability to discover what employees value as well as the resources or training employees need to succeed.

Borg Debono et al. (2013), Pater (2011), Bevan (2011), and Kouzes and Posner (2011) each presented a theme that guided the development of this study's research question. The first theme was that some organizations did not have leaders who could effectively elicit effective workplace engagement, which stemmed from engagement behaviors from employees (Pater, 2011). The second theme indicated that an organization's success level depended on a leader's effectiveness at implementing strategies for change (Bevan, 2011). The third theme was that if leaders engaged in the best leadership behaviors, then their ability to get employee buy-in and engagement increased (Kouzes & Posner, 2011). Each of these three themes required research that provided understanding of the lived behaviors to respond to the research question. Through the utilization of this strategy to respond to the research question, the strategy eliminated the quantitative and mixed methods research methodologies as viable alternatives for this study.

Qualitative research does not have a philosophic assumption or conclusion based on having a familiarity of the beliefs of the subject matter, as needed with mixed methods research (Symonds & Gorard, 2010). Mixed methods research encompasses both standardized measures and an explanation to capture a comprehensive description and understanding of the behaviors, which takes longer to finalize (Davison, Martinsons, & Ou, 2012). Although qualitative research did not require the same use of distinct measurements, it continued to provide the holistic response through less standardized measures than mixed methods research (Davison et al., 2012). Mixed methods research incorporates both qualitative and quantitative aspects for research. Because I did not utilize a philosophic assumption and quantitative measurements, the mixed methods design was not appropriate for this study.

Research Design

I utilized a descriptive design. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore strategies small business leaders used to identify and develop an effective leadership style to improve workplace engagement. A purposive sample of the highest-ranking executives described their perceptions about these strategies to overcome barriers. The descriptive design was the most appropriate choice for this study because of the focus on the behaviors experienced by these leaders.

Dong, Clapper, and Szyld (2013) suggested descriptive research occurred with the anticipation that new information would arise through observing lived behaviors of participants within the study without affecting their traditional behavior. Figueroa, Zeng-Treitler, Kandula, and Ngo (2012) suggested that researchers must separate their own viewpoints to obtain the information of those investigated. Other designs fell short of providing the required knowledge to reply to this study's research question because they required gathering information from a source other than directly from the leaders, which was crucial for this research.

Descriptive design, as described by Bleijenbergh et al. (2011), provided researchers with the ability to explore concrete and absolute experiences from participants who reported realities from lived experiences of behavioral occurrences. Additionally, Bryman (2012) stated that qualitative researchers used a descriptive design to elicit responses to interview questions from participants' lived experiences, which facilitated the timely gathering of actual reasons straight from participants on what strategies small business leaders used to improve workplace engagement. Other designs, such as grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies did not provide the necessary information to address the research question.

Nicola et al. (2012) suggested that utilization of the grounded theory research design explained processes, actions, or interactions among a group of people. Further, Nicola et al. stated that this explanation occurred through uncovering relevant conditions through participants' reactions to conditions and the consequences following. Moreover, Marshall and Rossman (2011) stated that when carrying out a grounded theory approach, a researcher created theories by conducting interviews with participants, applying concept labels to data collected, and comparing the like concept labels to one another to accumulate data to analyze.

Maxwell (2013) described the ethnographic approach as when a researcher was interested in an entire group that shared a common culture. Additionally, ethnography was well-suited for qualitative studies to develop a portrait of how people interact, behave, and share beliefs (Maxwell, 2013). By contrast, the case study design was about the how and why of a specific setting (Maxwell, 2013). Grounded theory, ethnography, and case study may have failed to garner the essential data because researchers utilizing these designs did not gather rich textural data with depth and breadth, but rather (a) explained processes or interactions among people through concept labels, (b) investigated an entire group that shared a common culture, or (c) studied the how and why of a specific setting (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Maxwell, 2013; Nicola et al., 2012).

By interviewing the highest-ranking executives, I expected to gather new data about what strategies to overcome barriers prevented small business leaders from adopting a more effective leadership style. In turn, these data might assist organizations through sharing knowledge and effect a positive social change through responding to strategies to overcome barriers preventing small business leaders from adopting a more effective leadership style. I utilized open-ended semistructured questions to interview these chief executive officers. According to Effelsberg et al. (2014), open-ended interview questions can assist in producing explanations, which could bring new data to the topic.

The descriptive design was the appropriate choice for this study because of the focus on the actions of how small business leaders developed strategies to identify and address barriers to effecting changes in leadership style to improve workplace engagement. Utilizing open-ended interview questions with a purposive sample, the participants best expressed their lived experiences through a descriptive approach because the importance of understanding the basics of the business problem occurred through describing the behaviors and actions. I ensured data saturation through creation of a chart that recorded the themes that occurred in the responses, the progression of the themes identified, and evaluation of the point at which new data provided little or no change to the themes already presented. To fully explore this business problem, it was critical to understand these behaviors that participants experienced and engage the participants in a deep and penetrating manner. Through utilization of the descriptive design for this study, the rich and textural data that came from the interviews were expected to provide the appropriate response to the business problem and research question.

Population and Sampling

This study's focus was to explore strategies small business leaders used to develop to minimize the barriers to adopting an effective leadership style to improve workplace engagement. The desired population for the study was the highest-ranking executives in small businesses in the Mid-Atlantic region in the states of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. The organizations that had individuals participating, met the following criteria: (a) each organization had between 50 and 250 employees; (b) each organization operated in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States; (c) each organization was a for-profit; and (d) each organization was a member of either the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, or the Mid-Atlantic Executive Area Leader's Society (MEALS).

The highest-ranking executive participants met the following criteria: (a) participants were the highest-ranking executive within their organizations; (b) participants worked in their position for at least 1 year; and (c) knowingly experienced an organizational effort to attempt a new leadership style to improve workplace engagement within the last 5 years, which ensured this process was still familiar to the participants. To gain access to qualified and interested participants involved the Executive Directors of the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, and the Mid-Atlantic Area Leader's Society (MEALS) contacting their active membership base to assist me with building a research relationship. Rao (2012) stated that with the potential interviewees coming from a purposefully sampled group, their contribution and knowledge assisted the overall research and its discoveries. The contact attempted to link participant's interests to the potential social impact, because the research might result in deepening knowledge about strategies to overcome barriers to a more effective leadership style. I gained access to interested participants through the following steps.

Steps to Engage Potential Participants

1. I involved the Executive Directors from the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, and MEALS since they had the most updated contact information for the small business leaders in this area.
2. The Executive Directors emailed my organizational invitation letter to the highest-ranking executive at small business within the whole membership base that qualified for this study asking them to respond to me directly with the contact information within the organizational invitation letter.
3. Once the highest-ranking executive responded to the organizational invitation letter, I emailed the invitation and consent form to them for review and signature.
4. I moved forward with the interviews as soon as I received the necessary consent forms.
5. I reached out via email to each participant and mutually determined the timing and best place for the interview to occur that allowed for utmost privacy.
6. I greeted the participant at the pre-determined location and time and answered any questions that the participant might have before the interview began.
7. I began the audio recording and started with the first interview question.
8. At the end of the interview, I thanked the participant and forwarded a summary of the results to them once they were transcribed.

I utilized a purposive sampling method to select the organizations whose leaders participated in this study. Safdar and Dupuis (2011) suggested that within the qualitative descriptive approach, researchers should purposefully choose a sample of interviewees who had a stake in the outcomes of the research. Suri (2011) stated that purposive sampling allowed those chosen to provide understanding and familiarity of the research topic to assist in responding to the research question. With the potential interviewees coming from a purposefully sampled group, the participants' contribution and knowledge was expected to assist the overall research and its discoveries.

The minimal size of the sample for this study consisted of 20 individuals, who were 20 of the highest-ranking executives in their organization. Rao (2012) stated that a smaller sample size, such as 20, was effective if researchers were studying behaviors. Additionally, Figueroa et al. (2012) suggested that the sample size of 20 allowed for thematic saturation, which occurred when new information no longer presented further themes. I ensured data saturation through creation of a chart that recorded the themes that occurred in the responses, the progression of the themes identified, and evaluation. Hence, the sample size of this study comprised of a minimum of 20 participants. In any case the sampling continued until I had demonstrated data and thematic saturation, to ensure no new information and themes emerged.

The policy of Walden University's DBA program for descriptive studies was a minimum of 20 participants. Rao (2012) and Trotter (2012) noted that sample sizes in descriptive designs needed to reflect the segment studied and that a sample size of 20 was sufficient to represent the population. Thus, the choice of interviewing a minimum of 20 of the highest-ranking executives within their organizations was sufficient from both a university policy vantage point and historical reference (Rao, 2012).

For the purposes of this study, the criteria were straightforward, specific, and clear. The interviews occurred within the city where the participants worked. The participants dictated the specific location of the interview, as long as adequate privacy was available. The participants' choice allowed for their privacy and confidentiality, if they chose. The participants had the profound knowledge of their organizations to respond to the semistructured interview questions. Finally, the participants signed a consent form affirming their wish to participate in the study.

Ethical Research

In ethical research, there is an acceptable code of conduct and responsibility required to ensure respect and justice (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). There were no foreseeable risks to the participants from this research. Prior to the start of this research, participants received an invitation informing them, in writing, the features and objectives of this study and they needed to sign a statement giving their informed consent to participate (see Appendix B). Participants signed the informed consent form prior to responding to any interview questions, if they decided to take part in the research study (see Appendix B). Any pertinent information about the study was available for participants to make an informed decision on whether or not to participate in the study.

Participants did not worry about the confidentiality of their responses throughout the study because nothing asked of them compromised their occupation or revealed their identity. The participants received assurances that the records of the study remained private and not accessible to others. Utilization of the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) process ensured that all ethical practices occurred during the research.

There were no incentives used to entice participation. Respect for the participants' decision to contribute or not occurred, and no one treated them differently if they decided not to participate in the study. If individuals decided to participate in the study, they could have withdrawn at a later time, and ended their participation at any time. Participants could have withdrawn from the study by calling, e-mailing, or sending a letter to me.

Cole et al. (2011) stated that all participants in the study had the right to privacy, and had the right to refuse the interview or answer any questions during the interview process. Hurt and McLaughlin (2012) emphasized the importance of protecting the privacy and confidentiality of individuals who agreed to participate in a research study. I coded the digital files with unique codes that left participants' identities and their organizations they worked for confidential. The interviews occurred on differing dates, depending on the participants' schedules and ability to meet.

To protect confidentiality, recording of all interviews occurred utilizing a digital recorder and labeled with a company code A, B, and so forth for organizations, participant code L01, L02, and so forth for leaders. Recording of each interview occurred in a separate digital file. Additionally, labeling of each interview occurred with the assigned interview code to ensure confidentiality of the participants. After labeling the recordings, the audio files will remain at my home office in Greensboro, NC on a flash drive in my locked filing cabinet for 5 years after the study ends at which time I will delete the files, as required by Walden University policy. To protect the rights of the participants, no one else had or will have access to the information, since I personally collected and stored all information on my flash drive.

Data Collection

Instruments

I acted as the collection instrument to gather a unique set of open-ended questions to obtain information through semistructured interviews on the strategies to overcome barriers that small business leaders faced to develop an effective leadership style to improve workplace engagement. Qualitative researchers have used this strategy for semistructured interviews (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). In this study, I enhanced the reliability and validity of this study by assuming all responsibility, as the only data collection instrument. Member checking occurred through participants' reviewing and concurring with the researcher's interpretation of the interview responses, how the responses addressed the research question, the data gathered and analyzed. The purpose of the first interview question was to elicit what organizational actions leaders acted upon that engaged employees, which increased organizational effectiveness. The purpose of the second question was to determine what factors prevented leaders from getting employees to commit to organizational goals completely.

Answers to the third question were to ascertain what actions from employees became barriers to leaders attempting to implement strategies for change. The next three questions were (a) determine what actions from leaders hindered employees from embracing strategies for change; (b) revealed how leaders could counter the actions of employees, organizational policies, or insufficient training from hindering them from engaging in the best leadership practices; and (c) established how a leader could achieve buy-in from the employees. From these interview questions, I collected rich and textural data, and derived themes from responses. I utilized triangulation as it is a potent practice that aided in validation of data through cross-verification from multiple sources.

While interviewees chose the setting and timing of their interview to ensure their comfort, privacy, and confidentiality, I followed the same interview protocol for all face-to-face interviews (see Appendix C). To respond to the business problem, I acted as the collection instrument to gather open-ended responses to the interview questions. The order of the interview questions (see Appendix D) permitted the interviewees to add information, which built onto the prior responses to contribute to a thorough set of answers (Bernard, 2013).

In the interview process, obtaining information occurred mainly through the participants' own comments. Each participant completed an Informed Consent Form (see Appendix B). Each participant received, via email, the consent form for review prior to their interview. Participants signed and returned the document to me prior to responding to any interview questions, which I secured and will continue to secure in my locked filing cabinet for a period of 5 years.

To accommodate the schedule of participants, in person interviews occurred within the city where the participants work. The participants dictated the location of the interview, as long as adequate privacy was available. I encouraged the participants to speak openly about their experiences. Audio taping of interviews occurred for transcription, but the confidentiality of the participants remained confidential.

Data Collection Technique

While interviewees chose the setting and timing of their interview to ensure their comfort, privacy, and confidentiality, adherence to the same interview protocol for all face-to-face interviews (see Appendix C) ensured consistency. The participants responded to a unique set of interview questions (see Appendix D). Before the beginning of the interviews, I received permission from the interviewees to digitally record and transcribe their responses. For any participants not willing to have their interviews recorded, I took hand-written notes, which the participant validated for accuracy. Note-taking during the interviews assisted in clarifying any responses that occurred during the interviews. Member checking occurred through participants' reviewing and concurring with the researcher's interpretation of the interview responses, how the responses addressed the research question, the data gathered and analyzed.

Opdenakker (2006) stated that advantages existed for face-to-face interviews. Opdenakker suggested that actions such as voice intonation and body language further added to the responses to the interview questions. A disadvantage might include cues that would lead the interviewees in a biased direction. Leveraging of any advantages and the ability to overcome disadvantages occurred through following the interview protocol provided in Appendix C.

Immediately following each interview, utilization of a reflective journal to record issues that might require clarification ensued (Bernard, 2013). With the permission of the participant, I digitally recorded the interviews and the reflective journal entries with my Livescribe pen. The Livescribe pen digitally recorded each interview and utilization of Dragon Voice software converted the recorded responses into text file documents. I reviewed the converted files for comparison against the recordings for reliability. I did not utilize a pilot study in this research study.

I used NVivo 10 to identify and analyze the significant themes. NVivo 10 allowed for appropriate coding, which connected themes among the interview transcribed documents. NVivo 10 is used in research when researchers strive to identify coding with qualitative searching, and modeling (Castleberry, 2014). Through better grouping and understanding of the underlying themes in the interview process, an enhanced analysis of the data was possible. NVivo 10 assisted me with this study in coding and organizing the data, recognizing themes by emphasizing crucial topics, and summarizing the themes by revealing the most common themes articulated through the interview process.

Rao (2012) stated that a smaller sample size, such as 20, was effective if researchers were studying behaviors. Thus, utilization of a sample size of a minimum of 20 participants was acceptable to explore the lived experiences of the population for a qualitative descriptive study. I utilized triangulation which aided in validation of data through cross-verification from multiple sources. These 20 participants participated in interviews that lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and each participant agreed to participate by completing a Consent Form (see Appendix A).

The participants signed and returned the documents prior to participating in an interview. Once I received the consent form, the scheduling of face-to-face interviews occurred, which accommodated all participants' schedules. I collected data through face-to-face interviews by recording audio and taking written notes during the interviews. The process of preparing for and collecting the data occurred in the following manner:

1. Explanation to the interviewee of the purpose of the study
2. Assurance of confidentiality and that the consent form was signed
3. Monitoring my body language to make sure I did not influence any of the answers
4. Digitally recording each interview and assigning the letter A, B, and so forth for the organizations, L for leaders with a corresponding number in numerical order
5. Recording the organization letter and interviewee letter and number on top of the page next to their name
6. Asking of the interview questions in the same order for all interviewees
7. Recording the interview comments exactly as stated; and thanking the interviewee for his/her participation.

I maintained and will continue to maintain the data collected on a USB drive in my locked filing cabinet for a period of 5 years and will destroy all data after 5 years.

Data Organization Techniques

The identity of participants and organizations involved remained confidential through (a) assignment of the letter *A*, *B*, and so forth for each organization, and (b) the letter *L* for the highest-ranking executives with a number from 1 to 20. Each participant had a folder with (a) transcribed interview notes, (b) my field notes on body language, (c) description of any occurrences that happened during the interview that might have helped explain responses, and (d) any other material that pertained to the research process and the participants. I uploaded, coded, and organized the data with the use of NVivo 10 software. I maintained and will continue to maintain the data collected on a USB drive in my locked filing cabinet for a period of 5 years and then will destroy the information.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore strategies small business leaders used to identify and develop an effective leadership style to improve workplace engagement. I asked the participants a unique set of interview questions. The participants responded to the interview questions were the highest-ranking executive at a small businesses.

Coding and organization of data from the interviews for themes, characteristics, and descriptions occurred utilizing NVivo 10 software. The software allowed for coding and identifying relationships among themes identified from interview data. I followed Moustakas' (1994) modified van Kaam method of analysis for the exploration of the data. The first step was listing and grouping the quotes within the data relevant to each topic. Second, reduction and elimination of data allowed me to determine whether the data were sufficient for understanding the topic, and which quotes were not relevant for addressing the purpose of the study. Third, clustering and categorization of the themes of the data permitted me to highlight the pertinent data.

Next, I performed a check on the themes derived from the participants against the raw data to assure accuracy. The fifth step was a description of each interviewee's experience with examples from their transcribed interviews. Finally, I provided a description of how the interviewees' responses appear with all the elements together. For example, if all the participants stated that a particular barrier had the same effect on changes in small business leadership styles, I described how that particular barrier stood out from others due to its frequency.

Detection of similarities among interviewees' responses, such as a repeated barrier or behavior, occurred through utilization of the code feature in NVivo 10. The purpose was to answer the research question through the themes derived from Moustakas' (1994) modified van Kaam approach, which provided participants' ideas, concepts, and experiences to respond to the research question. I used data analysis to synthesize the themes from the responses collected through the leaders (Singleton & Straits, 2010). I presented the resulting themes in Section 3, including pertinent quotes from the participants and conclude Section 3 with interpretation of the leaders' themes.

The conceptual framework for this study came from both the theory of leadership styles by Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2002) and expectancy theory by Vroom and Deci (1970). Goleman et al. suggested that comprehension of the concept of resonance is essential to understanding primal leadership theory because leaders capture their personal origins in each of the six approaches on how to improve their organizations. Goleman et al. noted that the leaders who are best at creating resonance were those who engaged their employees, were in tune with their employees' feelings, and guided them through encouragement.

Vroom and Deci (1970) suggested through the expectancy theory that an individual's behavior resulted from choices from a variety of options, which increased pleasure and decreased pain. Vroom and Deci stated that (a) there was a positive association between an individual's effort and performance, (b) strong performance resulted in a positive reward, (c) the reward satisfied an individual's need, and (d) the longing to satisfy the individual's need made the effort worthwhile. Within the expectancy theory, management must discover what employees valued and the resources or training employees needed to succeed.

I utilized the constructs of the two conceptual frameworks elements to relate to the interview questions for this study by studying whether the responses to the questions respond to the main tenets of both the theory of leadership styles and the expectancy theory. For instance, the conceptual framework distinction of a positive association between a person's effort and performance related to the first and sixth interview questions (Vroom & Deci, 1970). Both interview questions addressed the association between an action or effort that resulted in improved effectiveness or performance. The third and fourth interview questions related to the same distinction of the conceptual framework. However, the fifth and sixth interview questions inversely related to the conceptual framework, because these questions addressed how actions hindered performance (Vroom & Deci, 1970).

Furthermore, the conceptual framework of the presence of resonance related to the fifth interview question. This interview question related to the presence of resonance through determining how leaders achieved buy-in from employees (Goleman et al., 2002). This determination addressed how the leader became in tune with their employees' feelings and guided them in an encouraging fashion through speaking honestly about their values and plans (Goleman et al., 2002).

Through the identification of the responses to the interview questions that utilized the conceptual framework constructs, the reasons why some strategies to overcome barriers occurred in reaching these framework tenets might have arisen, which addressed the research question. Consequently, within the context of the conceptual framework, responses from the interview questions indicated why employee performance and resonance broke down through determining what strategies to overcome barriers prevented small business leaders from adopting a more effective leadership style when attempting to improve workplace engagement.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are essential to guarantee the credibility of the results of any study. Kisely and Kendall (2011) stated that reliability referred to the degree that other researchers might replicate the study and anticipate finding results, which are consistent. Further, Thomas and Magilvy (2011) proposed that reliability occurred when other researchers can follow the steps of the study, which created an auditable path.

Moustakas (1994) stated that validity referred to the accuracy of the research results. Moreover, Thomas and Magilvy (2011) suggested that validity occurred through checking if the data collected represents the whole population. I ensured data saturation through creation of a chart that recorded the themes that occurred in the responses, the progression of the themes identified, and evaluation of the point at which new data provided little or no change to the themes already presented. I utilized triangulation, which aided in validation of data through cross-verification from multiple sources.

Reliability and validity allows interested readers to authenticate the credibility, transferability, dependability, and ability to confirm the findings of this study (Toloie-Eshlaghy, Chitsaz, Karimian, & Charkhchi, 2011). Denzin (2012) determined reliability and validity in research included (a) findings considered *credible*; (b) findings that were *transferable* to similar circumstances; (c) findings were *dependable* and documented the fluidity that transpired in every natural setting; and (d) research which was *confirmable* through core alignment of data, findings, and all recommendations.

Reliability

A qualitative study provided rich descriptions of the purpose, design, and implementation processes to ensure reliability. Kisely and Kendall (2011) stated that qualitative researchers achieved reliability through establishing credibility of the information through peer review. Williams and Morrow (2009) suggested a detailed process for providing reliability and replication of research. Williams and Morrow concluded that attaining reliable information included (a) interviewing well-informed participants; (b) remaining open to new concepts; and (c) accurately integrate the topic experts’ familiarity into the findings to supply the groundwork for understanding the results. Thomas and Magilvy (2011) proposed that reliability occurred when the researcher established credibility of the results through an auditable path through the following steps:

1. Describing the purpose of the study,
2. Discussing selection of the participants,
3. Collecting the data,
4. Evaluating the collection process,

5. Explaining how the data were transformed for analysis,
6. Discussing the interpretation of the results and presentation, and
7. Articulating the techniques utilized to determine validity.

To ensure qualitative reliability, I adhered to Moustakas' (1994) modified van Kaam method of information, which incorporated the aforementioned reliability standards. Utilization of Moustakas' modified van Kaam method of analysis involved the classification of data obtained according to frequency of occurrence. I analyzed participants' interview responses utilizing Moustakas' modified van Kaam methodology. Using this process allowed me to identify core themes of the data based on frequency of occurrence of responses.

For dependability, I utilized a journal to note the natural setting of decisions and highlights and provided an audit trail that (a) noted processes, (b) stated the analysis steps, (c) mentioned changes in processes, and (d) all findings. To ensure research that was confirmable, I kept a journal to ensure alignment of data and findings along with an audit trail that (a) verified analysis steps, (b) mentioned process changes, and (c) documented the study's processes. Member checking occurred through participants' reviewing and concurring with the researcher's interpretation of the interview responses, how the responses addressed the research question, the data gathered and analyzed. Further, the use of my interview protocol allowed others to replicate the interview procedures (see Appendix C).

Validity

Rennie (2012) claimed that a researcher's preconceived thoughts and perceptions on validity in research might bias the results. Furthermore, Williams and Morrow (2009) stated that researcher bias could affect the validity of a study. To help counter researcher bias, I utilized bracketing. Moustakas (1994) suggested that bracketing is a process that a researcher might utilize to recognize and avoid biases from tainting the data collection and data analysis processes.

Moustakas (1994) further stated that bracketing served as a method of validating a qualitative study through the act of suspending judgment about the world to focus specifically on the analysis of the research. I performed the following activities that added credibility to the study: (a) archiving data for 5 years, (b) had a journal that provided notes from the interviews, (c) had an open process that suspended judgment and dealt with any biases, (d) performed a repeated scientific approach and utilized NVivo analysis for coding and consistency, (e) through following an interview protocol and interview guide, (f) through reaching data saturation of a purposive sample, and (g) through member checking for accuracy of participants' responses. For transferability, I (a) took notes in a journal to keep notes from the interviews to ensure similar circumstances, (b) ensured data triangulation through use of participants from multiple environments, and (c) provided thick description to give the level of detail that others might apply for future research in similar settings.

Toloie-Eshlaghy et al. (2011) suggested that awareness by researchers that their experiences and background can affect the validity of research was necessary. I remained aware of my personal lived experiences and biases through bracketing, which assisted me in suspending judgment about the outside world and focus on the research analysis.

Thomas and Magilvy (2011) noted that member checking provides an additional level of validity. Member checking occurred through participants' reviewing and concurring with the researcher's interpretation of the interview responses, how the responses addressed the research question, the data gathered and analyzed.

Changes or corrections occurred immediately as identified and reviewed with the participant for validation. Denzin (2012) stated triangulation was a potent practice that aided validation of data through cross-verification from multiple sources and increased the credibility and validity of the study's results. Denzin further stated triangulation is an effort to explain more completely, the richness and intricacy of human behavior by researching from more than one viewpoint.

Transition and Summary

I performed open-ended, digitally recorded interviews with 20 highest-ranking executives in their organization, which determined what strategies small business leaders used to improve workplace engagement. I recorded notes and observations of the interviewees during the interview process to assist with addressing the research question. The primary means for collecting data was face-to-face interviews. NVivo10 assisted me with analysis of the data through coding and identifying repetitive themes.

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore strategies small business leaders used to identify and develop an effective leadership style to improve workplace engagement. A qualitative study was appropriate because little literature was available about the strategies small business leaders used to identify and address to adopting a more effective leadership style to improve workplace engagement. I presented the lived and shared experiences of the interviewees and their knowledge to respond to the research question. Methods for assuring validity and reliability included bracketing, transcribing the interviews, data saturation, and member checking.

Section 3 begins with the purpose of the study and restating of the research question. Section 3 continues with (a) a presentation of the findings, (b) application to the business environment, (c) implications of social change, (d) recommendations for action, and (e) any recommendations for future study. Section 3 concludes with my reflections and lessons learned from designing, implementing, and completing this current study.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

The purpose of Section 3 is to provide an overview of the research findings related to this qualitative descriptive study. This section includes (a) an overview of the study, (b) a presentation of findings, (c) applications to professional practice, (d) implications for social change, (e) recommendations for action, (f) recommendations for further study, (g) reflections, and (h) summary and study conclusions.

Overview of Study

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore strategies small business leaders use to identify and develop effective leadership styles to improve workplace engagement. This purposive sample of 20 individuals worked in the geographic boundaries of the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States and were located in Winston-Salem, North Carolina and Greensboro, North Carolina. The target population was the highest-ranking executives at small businesses with between 50 and 250 employees in the Mid-Atlantic region. I interviewed participants using an interview questionnaire approved by the Walden University IRB approval number 06-08-15-0369421. The guiding research question for this study was: What strategies do small business leaders use to improve workplace engagement? I utilized NVivo 10 software to analyze and identify prevalent themes from responses I received from participants. NVivo 10 allowed me to associate the themes and codes between the interview responses.

Identification of words and themes provided me a deeper understanding of the participants' answers. The prevalent themes in participant responses were: (a) the need for strategic meetings, (b) the need for communication between leaders and staff, and (c) the need to dedicate more time to employees to avoid disengagement. Many participants articulated that a lack of communication and lack of time for interacting with staff are key barriers to engagement. Participants also stated that including employees in meetings assisted in engaging employees.

Presentation of the Findings

The central research question for the research study was: What strategies do small business leaders use to improve workplace engagement? I utilized the modified Van Kaam method of analysis for the interviews and prioritized the themes based on the number of statements received that reflected each theme. The participants in the study responded to semistructured interview questions based on their experiences in improving workplace engagement. I analyzed the participants' responses for significant themes utilizing NVivo 10 data analysis software. I found three distinct themes during analysis: (a) the need for meetings, (b) the need for open and candid communication, and (c) the need to dedicate more time to employees to avoid disengagement. A list of key words I created from interviewees' responses was helpful in the formation of the themes.

Key Words

I generated a list of keywords from the participants' responses to the interview questions. Tables 1 through 3 highlight the words most frequently used by the interviewees. The word *employee* was the most frequently used (f = 40), *meetings* was the second most used word (f = 28), and *participative* closely followed (f = 22). A statement by Interviewee AL01 provides a clear example of how participants used these key words in conjunction. The participant noted the efficacy of "offsite participative meetings where

I gather employee opinions and then we collectively discuss viability of those opinions and if viable implement them." Other words, such as, *time* (*f* = 21) and *change* (*f* = 18) were also frequently used by the participants (see Table 1). For instance, Interviewee KL11 stated, "There is no time for communication between supervisors and employees to share about the change reason." Interviewee RL18 noted, "Take the time to actually listen and respond to employee inquiries."

Table 1

Word Frequency: Words Over 18 Uses

Word	Count	Weighted Percentage
Employee	40	3.0%
Meetings	28	2.1%
Participative	22	1.7%
Time	21	1.7%
Change	18	1.3%

Table 2 contains key words utilized between 7 and 17 times. The words *benefits* (*f* = 15), *empower* (*f* = 10), and *communication* (*f* = 10) were associated with employee engagement (see Table 2). For example, Interviewee LL12 commented, "Benefits like employee banquets, employee of the month and year recognition, extra compensation opportunities, and asking for their opinion." In another instance, Interviewee BL02 stated an organizational intention to "empower employees to take innovative approaches to solve problems and give them the autonomy to do so." Further, Interviewee HL08 mentioned, "communication on why I am changing things. They want me to reveal all my thinking on the change."

Table 2

Word Frequency: Words Used Between 7 and 17 Times

Word	Count	Weighted Percentage
Benefits	15	1.1%
Empower	10	0.7%
Communication	10	0.7%
Strategy	8	0.6%
Improve	8	0.6%
Opinion	8	0.6%
Understand	7	0.5%

Interviewees also utilized the words *opportunity* (f = 6), *idea* (f = 6), and *compensation* (f = 6) in regard to the concept of engagement (see Table 3). For instance, Interviewee JL10 reported, “I like to pass along objectives and opportunities and let the employees guide the company where they have been directed to do.” Another participant, Interviewee PL16 emphasized attempts to “get the employees to be more participative and share their ideas.” Finally, Interviewee GL07 noted, “compensation and advancement opportunities” increased organizational effectiveness, and engagement.

Table 3

Word Frequency: Words Used Between 1 and 6 Times

Word	Count	Weighted Percentage
Opportunity	6	0.5%
Teams	6	0.5%
Idea	6	0.5%
Compensation	6	0.5%
Engagement	5	0.4%
Scared	4	0.3%
Micro-manage	4	0.3%

Theme 1: Need for Meetings

Interviewees expressed the need for meetings to increase engagement. Twelve interviewees (60%) noted that a meeting should be more participative. For example, Interviewee CL03 commented, “Strategic participative meetings asking for input on various issues is vital for engagement.” Five interviewees (25%) noted the importance of implementing information gathered by staff as the key to engagement. Interviewee NL14 observed, “Ask their opinion and then show them it becomes implemented.” Three interviewees (15%) insisted that meetings with employees must be strategic (15%). Interviewee BL02 suggested “offsite strategic meetings” as another vital aspect of employee engagement. Participants also discussed the importance of the need for meetings to engage employees from both an organizational perspective and on an individual leader level.

The findings regarding the need for meetings aligned with attributes from previous studies that have indicated meetings between organizational leaders and their staff increases organizational effectiveness (Anaza & Rutherford, 2012; Andrew & Sofian, 2012; Hur et al., 2011). Meetings utilized to engage employees likely increase their effectiveness, whereas, disengaged employees are less likely to have the same level of effectiveness (Hur et al., 2011). I summarize, in Table 4, the percentage of participants that mentioned the need for meetings from solely an organizational perspective, from only an individual leader direction, and from both an organizational and individual leader standpoint to improve organizational effectiveness.

Table 4

Type of Meetings Needed to Increase Organizational Effectiveness

Theme	Percentage Ranking
Organizational Only	55%
Organizational & Individual Leader	35%
Individual Leader Only	10%

Theme 2: Need for Communication

Interviewees also expressed the need for communication to increase engagement. Eight interviewees (40%) indicated the need and importance of open and candid communication as a key factor in their staff's engagement. For example, Interviewee DL04 commented, "Empower them with special tasks and let them bring it home by providing open and candid communication on the task."

Eight interviewees (40%) also stated the need to improve communication skills in order to increase organizational efficiencies through employee engagement. For instance, Interviewee EL05 noted with regard to increasing organizational efficiencies through employee engagement, "I have gotten outside help to make me better at leadership and communication skills." Six interviewees (30%) responded that leaders who fail to communicate organizational goals have employees who feel disconnected and disengaged. For example, Interviewee TL20 suggested with regard to leaders failing to communicate organizational goals, "Employees will lose trust in the leader who does not articulate their goals and vision."

These findings on communication also tied to the conceptual framework of my study (Goleman et al., 2002; Vroom & Deci, 1970). The findings regarding communication themes aligned with the theory of leadership styles (Goleman et al., 2002) by way of resonance and the need to direct and encourage through communication in order to reach engagement of employees. The findings on communication aligned with expectancy theory (Vroom & Deci, 1970) since again management must discover what employees value in order to succeed.

The findings on the need for communication between leaders and employees also align to literature on the most effective business practices. For instance, Chi et al. stated that communication is the fundamental ingredient to effective business practices, which moves employees toward engagement. Recently, Stanimirovic (2015) suggested that continued communication helps employees to feel satisfied in their job and that they provide value to the organization. Stanimirovic stated that this communication promoted a sense of success and accomplishment, which leads to engagement and organizational effectiveness.

The findings about the need for communication aligned with features from previous studies that indicated communication between leaders and their staff increases emotional resonance and engagement (Swarnalatha & Prasanna, 2013; Hur et al., 2011). Further alignment between the findings and previous studies showed that leaders understand that having a communication process improves the likelihood of engaged employees and organizational effectiveness (Mishra et al., 2014; Friedman, 2011). Participants discussed a wide range of need for communication themes, which I summarized in Table 5 ranked from highest to lowest.

Table 5

Need for Communication Themes by Percentage

Theme	Percentage Ranking
Organizational Changes	45%
Reveal Thinking	30%
Several Layers Deep	15%
How to Communicate	10%

Theme 3: Dedicate More Time to Employees to Avoid Disengagement

Interviewees articulated the lack of time was a dynamic barrier to engaging staff for organizational improvement and that they must dedicate more time to employees to avoid disengagement. Twelve interviewees (60%) stated that a lack of time delayed them from adequately engaging employees. For example, Interviewee FL06 commented, "I have too much to do and not enough time to interact with employees, much less engage them". Again, twelve interviewees (60%) suggested the lack of time was due to the demands of their current position. Interviewee QL17 noted with regard to demands on time and employee engagement, "I want to engage my employees, but to many other conflicts to handle".

Eight interviewees (40%) responded that dedicating more of their time might avoid disengagement of employees. For instance, Interviewee SL19 suggested, "Allowing employees to be involved in most aspects of the company and helping to direct it engages not disengages your employees". Six interviewees (30%) stated providing their time and strategic direction was a key tool for engaging their employees. Interviewee ML13 stated, "Provide your time and vision along with money and other types of non-monetary benefits. Those are the keys to engagement".

This study's findings on dedicating more time to employees to avoid disengagement by leaders again tied to the conceptual framework theories. The findings showing that dedicating more time to employees to avoid disengagement by leaders to engage their employees aligned with the theory of leadership styles (Goleman et al., 2002) through a lack of reaching resonance via any of the six approaches that lead toward organizational improvement and employee engagement. The findings on dedicating more time to employees to avoid disengagement provided by leaders aligned with expectancy theory (Vroom & Deci, 1970) given that there is a positive association between an individual's effort and performance and when leaders do not provide adequate time for their employees the performance will suffer.

The findings on dedicating more time to employees to avoid disengagement links into the literature on most effective business practices. For example, Hoffman et al. (2011) stated that providing the time necessary to engage employees gives the leader the awareness and ability to lead the organization in an effective and efficient manner. Rickwood (2015) expressed that a lack of time from leaders to their employees breeds mistrust and disrespect, which leads to poor performance within the organization and disengagement. Further, Rickwood suggested that if leaders provide the time to interact with their employees there is a higher chance of adherence to processes and an increase in organizational effectiveness.

The findings about dedicating more time to employees to avoid disengagement aligned with features from previous studies that indicated the need for time between leaders and their staff led to more fruitful organizational outcomes (Macmillian-Kang et al., 2011). Further alignment between the findings and previous studies showed that opportunities for leaders to manage their time better to allow for employee engagement reduced tension and confusion (Hong et al., 2011). Participants discussed a range of time availability based aspects in their responses, which I summarized in Table 6 ranked from highest to lowest.

Table 6

Participants Responding to Time Availability Aspects by Percentage

Theme	Percentage Ranking
Lack of Time Delaying Engagement	60%
Lack of Time Demands of Position	60%
Give Time to Avoid Disengagement	40%
More Time Key to Engagement	30%

These findings were consistent with the conceptual framework theories presented by Goleman et al. (2002) and Vroom and Deci (1970). These findings about participative meetings aligned with the theory of leadership styles (Goleman et al., 2002) through the theme of leaders who present their plans and encourage the same from their staff create resonance, which leads to engagement. Additionally, these findings around the value of these meetings aligned with expectancy theory (Vroom & Deci, 1970) since management must discover what employees value in order to succeed.

The findings on the need for meetings between leaders and employees also tie to literature on the most effective business practices. For instance, Aboyassin and Abood (2013) suggested that effective leaders have strategic meetings that engage employees. Most recently, Ghiyasvandian, Zakerimoghdam, and Peyravi (2015) expressed employees that do not have leaders who have strategic meetings to communicate organizational needs breed disengagement. Ghiyasvandian et al. stated employees' frustration increase and organizational effectiveness lowers.

Additional Suggestions

Interviewees articulated three themes; however, other suggestions stated by the interviewees lacked the repetition to become a theme to respond to the study's central research question: What strategies do small business leaders use to improve workplace engagement? Six participants provided suggestions that lacked repetition but were relevant to the study topic. I summarized in Table 7 other relevant suggestions ranked from highest frequency to lowest. Interviewees GL07 and JL10 indicated additional compensation in some cases, would improve workplace engagement. Participants KL11 and RL18 recommended that leaders manage ideas, not people. For instance, Interviewee RL18 suggested, "We don't see engagement in the same way – I bring the ideas, employees implement".

Table 7

Additional Relevant Suggestions Ranked from Highest to Lowest Frequency

Suggestion	Frequency
Compensate More	2
Management Ideas Only	2
Micro-manage	1
Non-engagement is bad	1

Applications to Professional Practice

This study added to the academic body of knowledge by identifying what strategies small business leaders use to improve workplace engagement. Organizational effectiveness is a key attribute to the success and efficiency of any organization with respect to professional practice in business. The fluctuating financial situation in the United States affects small business daily. The findings from this study give small business leaders the information necessary to develop strategies to improve workplace engagement, which improves organizational effectiveness and limits the amount of lost productivity initiated by disengaged employees.

In the past, leaders used various types of technology, Six Sigma, ISO certification, and best practices to increase efficiencies in small business. Unfortunately, there is an absence by leaders of the same drive to manage the lower productivity caused by a lack of engagement, which affects the profitability of many organizations (Hur et al., 2011). The characteristics of disengaged staff include a decrease in workplace effectiveness, a marked increase in rework, extreme waste, and missed deadlines reducing productivity (Meyer et al., 2011).

If leaders choose to learn from the findings of this study, they will experience a turn-around in the aforementioned behaviors and realize increases in productivity, organizational effectiveness, and financial performance. When organizations increase productivity, they will move toward financial competiveness, and extend the longevity of the organization (Hong et al., 2011). The findings from this study provide opportunities to cultivate and develop highly engaged employees, increase productivity, strengthen profitability, and retain the best employees through responding to the insights of this study’s participants (Shucka, Reio, Rocco, 2011). The findings highlighted what strategies leaders need to implement to engage employees better and provided areas for further study such as: (a) a need for quality meetings, (b) a need for open and candid communication, and (c) addressing leaders' time with respect to employee engagement.

Implications for Social Change

The importance of this research was the insights gained and opportunity provided for small business leaders to identify and address what strategies to overcome barriers preventing some small business leaders from adopting a more effective leadership style to improve workplace engagement. If leaders implement the findings from this study, the marketplace might experience a positive social change through increased employee morale. This potential increase to employee morale might lead to (a) achieving organizational goals (Lin & Hsiao, 2014), (b) stimulating conversation between the leader and employee, (c) establishing trust, (d) providing better guidance from the leader to the employee, (e) encouraging higher levels of loyalty toward the organization, (f) establishing a solid commitment to the work-place (Zeffane, Tipu, & Ryan, 2011), and (g) cultivating an improved outlook by employees on their future at their respective organizations, which may resonate within their families and communities.

Recommendations for Action

Small businesses may benefit from the data presented in this study to offset the effects of disengaged employees. Disengaged employees are a danger to productivity. Fifty percent of employees in the United States do not have full engagement, 23% of employees are totally disengaged, and 27% of employees are fully engaged (Maurer, 2011). Small businesses must ensure an effective leadership style is present to have as much as a 34% positive shift in employee engagement, which improves organizational productivity and viability (Lin & Wang, 2012).

I will present the data from the study to the regional Small Business Administration offices located in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States and publish in ProQuest. Data from the study may help develop professional applications and steps to overcome the challenges presented by disengaged employees and protect small businesses profitability through reducing the costly gap between an engaged and disengaged workforce.

Recommendations for Further Study

Exploring the strategy that small businesses might use to improve engagement led to the discovery of several themes that individuals should study in greater detail. Future studies for the following themes could be useful: (a) specific communication vehicles that influence employee engagement, (b) factors leaders utilize to influence organizational commitment, (c) employee's reactions to leader's influencing them to be engaged, and (d) the influence of employee performance on organizational performance.

Employee engagement affects multiple industries beyond small business. As a result, future studies of the aforementioned themes should add to the academic body of knowledge and professional application. Additionally, the themes presented above develop an approach to counter the negative effects of disengagement. Future studies should broaden the interviewee pool to ensure participant availability, so that a sufficient number of individuals might participate from this region and other region of the United State. Studies might also approach the research in a manner other than a qualitative descriptive manner to broaden the scope of the study topic and reducing any potential bias as the sole researcher for this study.

Reflections

This rigorous research trek was challenging and enlightening. Originally, I had a notion that the direction of this study would tell the stories from both the employee and leader perspectives; however, after much discussion with my chair addressing the leader perspective was determined as the best approach to respond to the research question. Through this process, I experienced a change for the better around leaders' approach to employee engagement. My optimism about the future relationships between leaders and employees has grown due to the research findings and responses from the interviewees.

Commitment for improvement appeared in many of the interviewees. There was a level of respect exuding from most of the interviewees about the business problem and their role in being part of the solution. Many of the challenges that leaders experienced seemed to be points that they could overcome and their responses supported that feeling. There is a lot of work still to do to ensure good interactions between leaders and employees that support strong organizational effectiveness and engagement, but if leaders follow the path of those that participated in this study the small business marketplace will continue to improve and become a positive model for employee and leader interactions in other business environments.

Summary and Study Conclusions

Small business leaders need to reevaluate how to increase organizational performance through employee engagement. Employee engagement has a direct link to increasing organizational performance. However, despite years of research, strategies to increase organizational performance through improving employee engagement shows mixed results. I researched this occurrence, because small business leaders struggle to identify what strategies have the most profound effect on improving employee engagement. The research data includes three distinct themes, which provide strategies for small business leaders to consider implementing through improving employee engagement: (a) need for meetings, (b) need for communication, and (c) need for time.

The research data has a clear message to small business leaders. Leaders should have strategic and participative meetings, which prepare their staff to address the demands of small business activities. Leaders must also have open and candid communication, which allows employees better understanding of the organization's needs. Finally, leaders must provide adequate time to spend with their employees to engage them fully, which preps the employees to improve organizational performance.

Existing small business leaders adopting these strategies identified above as a portion of their strategy might have sustainable organizational performance and data that benefit the employee, the leader and the organization. The investment in employees through meetings, communication, and time has a return on investment (ROI). The leaders adopting these strategies not only strengthen organizational performance, but also reduce bureaucratization and shift attitudes from impersonal judgment and extreme separation to engaging employees. This shift results in improving the employees' outlook on their future at their respective organizations.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Date:______________________________Location:_______________________________

Interviewer:________________________Interviewee:_____________________________

Instructions:

1) Explain to the interviewee the purpose of the study.
2) Assure confidentiality and ensure that the interviewee sign the release form.
3) Monitor my body language to make sure I do not influence any of the answers.
4) Digitally record each interview, and assign the letter A, B, and so forth for the organizations, L for leaders with a corresponding number in numerical order.
5) Record interviewee letter and number on top of page next to name.
6) Ask interview questions in same order.
7) Record the interviewees' comments exactly.
8) Ensure member checking occurs through participants' reviewing and concurring with the researcher's interpretation of the interview responses
9) Thank the interviewee for his/her participation

Appendix B: Invitation and Consent Form

INVITATION and CONSENT FORM

I am responding to your interest in taking part in a research study of Strategies to Overcome Barriers to a More Effective Leadership Style. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named David J. Barnwell, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive design study is to explore strategies small business leaders use to identify and develop an effective leadership style to improve workplace engagement. I will interview a purposive sample of 20 participants, which will include a sample of 20 of the highest-ranking executives in their organization. The geographic boundaries of this study are in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States and located in the following cities: (a) Winston-Salem, North Carolina; and (b) Greensboro, North Carolina. The target population is the highest-ranking executives at small businesses with between 50 and 250 employees in the Mid-Atlantic region.

The focus for this proposal is finding the strategies to overcome barriers that prevent organizational leaders from adopting a more effective leadership style. The data from this study might contribute to new insights and possibly provide financial savings to organizations represented in this purposive sample. The social change impact is the potential to influence business practice through getting leaders of organizations to implement the most effective leadership attributes within their organizations, thereby improving employee engagement and organizational effectiveness.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in a 30-45 minute interview. Additionally, you will be asked to answer the questions honestly. Here are some examples of the interview questions: (a) what behaviors have your employees demonstrated when you changed leadership style, (b) what organizational actions do you use to engage employees, which might result in an increase in organizational effectiveness, and (c) what actions have hindered your employees from embracing strategies for change? After I transcribe the data, I will audio record the interview and will present the data back to you for your review and validation.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. I will respect your decision to participate or not to participate in the study. If you decide to participate in the study, you can decide to change your mind at a later time. You may end your participation at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study involves little risk of minor discomforts that can be felt in everyday life, such as getting tired, stress of responding to a question or becoming upset at a topic. Being in this study would pose no risk to your safety or wellbeing.

Research on the topic of the strategies to overcome barriers that prevent leaders from adopting a more effective leadership style will assist business leaders to address organizational effectiveness. Your participation will help to bring an unbiased perspective.

Payment:

There will be no financial compensation for participating in this study. There is however the satisfaction of knowing that you contributed to the knowledge of business. More specifically, what strategies to overcome barriers prevent small business leaders from adopting a more effective leadership style.

Privacy:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. I encourage that you print a copy of this form and keep it for your records. You will not be asked to use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Additionally, this consent form and the data that identifies you as a participant will be securely kept by David Barnwell and nothing else that could identify you will be present in the study. Data will be kept secure by David J. Barnwell. The raw data will be kept at my home office in Greensboro, NC on a flash drive in my locked filing cabinet for 5 years after the study ends. As required by my University, when the five years expire, I will delete the files. No one else will have access to the information, since I will personally collect and store all information on my flash drive.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions at any time. I can be contacted at my university email at David.Barnwell@waldenu.edu. After the study is completed, I will send you a one to two page summary of the study results via email. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is Walden University Research Participant Advocate she can be contacted through her email at irb.waldenu.edu or contact number 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is 06-08-15-0369421 and it expires on June 7, 2016.

Statement of Consent:

I, the participant, have read the above information and feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

[redacted]

Signature

[redacted] [redacted]

Printed Name Date Signed

Appendix C: Organizational Invitation Letter

Dear [redacted],

I am a doctoral student conducting research on the strategies to overcome barriers that prevent small business leaders from adopting a more effective leadership style, and I would greatly appreciate your participation for my study through participating in a short interview, which should not take much of your time and remain confidential. You can and should assure yourself that all responses will be kept confidential and used for no other purpose other than academic research. The information gathered during the interview will collect your name on the invitation and consent form, however it will not be shared and for privacy will stay on a flash drive in a locked filing cabinet in my office. Additionally, no further personal information is necessary during the interview process.

Your assistance in helping me complete my doctoral research is appreciated. Results of this research project will be available once the study is published. If you are interested, please contact me at my email, david.barnwell@waldenu.edu

Thank you for your consideration,

David Barnwell

Appendix D: Open-ended Interview Questions

The small business highest-ranking executive will respond to the following interview questions:

1. What organizational actions do you use to engage employees, which might result in an increase organizational effectiveness?
2. What barriers keep you from engaging employees?
3. What behaviors have your employees demonstrated when you changed leadership styles?
4. What actions have hindered your employees from embracing strategies for change?
5. How have you countered the actions that delay you from engaging in the best leadership practices?
6. How do you engage employees?
7. Is there anything you would like to add to this interview to address any aspect of engagement?