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# Strategies Business Managers Use to Engage Employees in the Chemical Industry

Akeem A. Adeyemi  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Akeem Adeyemi

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Walden University  
2018

Abstract

Strategies Business Managers Use to Engage Employees in the Chemical Industry

by

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MS, New Jersey Institute of Technology Newark, 2010

BS, New Jersey Institute of Technology Newark, 2005

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

August 2018

## Abstract

Lack of employee engagement in the workplace is one of the leading causes of lost productivity in the United States, estimated to cost organizations between \$450 to \$550 billion per year. The purpose of this single case study was to explore the strategies that some business managers in the chemical industry use to engage employees and increase productivity. The population for the study consisted of 5 small chemical business managers of a chemical company in the northeastern United States that demonstrated success in engaging employees. The conceptual framework for the study was social exchange theory. Data were collected from small business managers via semistructured interviews detailing participants' strategies in engaging employees in the workplace and from company physical artifacts such as website, posters, bulletins, and signage. The collected data were transcribed, and member checking was completed to validate the credibility and trustworthiness. Yin's 5-step data analysis process for a case study and the main words in context analysis were used to analyze data. Three themes discovered in the study were: leadership support, effective communication, and recognition and reward. The findings from this study revealed that chemical business managers used strategies to influence employee engagement in the workplace. The impact of positive social change includes providing insights for managers on strategy implementation for employee engagement in the workplace to increase organizational productivity and stability, which could lead to a healthy economy in the community and employees contributing positively to communities and supporting their families.

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate my study to my wife, children, my daddy, mom, siblings, colleagues, and friends. If it were not for my family's endurance and support, this academic accomplishment would not have been successful.

## Acknowledgments

Most importantly, I thank God who has given me the strength and ability to complete this doctoral degree journey successfully. Thank you to my family who is my support system, and my reasons to endure to the finish line. Starting with my wife, Taiwo, and my four children (Aleem, Hakimah, Aqeel, & Abdullah Al-Azeem) and my family friend that introduced me to Walden University (future Dr. Sharafadeen Saidu).

Special thank you to Dr. Carol-Anne Faint, Denise Hackett, and Dr. Matthew Knight for making a positive impact on my success! To Dr. Carol-Anne Faint, my committee chair, I am genuinely thankful for you with the utmost respect for extremely fast turnarounds and excellent mentorship and guidance. In a short period of being my chair, you have become such a significant person in completing my doctoral degree.

To my second committee member, Dr. Denise Hackett, and URR, Dr. Matthew Knight, I sincerely thank you for accompanying me to the finish line, your expertise and feedback has contributed to my success, I am genuinely grateful for having you as part of my committee members. I am indebted to all friends, family, colleagues, and co-workers for your prayer, support, and motivation. Indeed, all of you are very special to me. Thank you!

## Table of Content

List of Tables .....	iv
Section 1: Foundation of the Study.....	1
Background of the Problem .....	1
Problem Statement .....	2
Purpose Statement.....	2
Nature of the Study .....	3
Research Question .....	4
Interview Questions .....	4
Conceptual Framework.....	5
Operational Definitions.....	6
Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations.....	7
Assumptions.....	7
Limitations .....	7
Delimitations.....	8
Significance of the Study .....	8
Contribution to Business Practice.....	8
Implications for Social Change.....	9
A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature.....	9
Social Exchange Theory .....	11
Alternative Theories.....	18
Employee Engagement: Topical Foundation.....	20



Determinants of Employee Engagement .....	23
Engagement Strategies .....	28
Employee Communication.....	31
Reward and Recognition.....	33
Employee Development and Extended Care .....	36
Transition .....	37
Section 2: The Project.....	38
Purpose Statement.....	38
Role of the Researcher .....	38
Participants.....	40
Research Method and Design .....	41
Research Method .....	41
Research Design.....	42
Population and Sampling .....	43
Ethical Research.....	45
Data Collection Instruments .....	46
Data Collection Technique .....	48
Data Organization Technique .....	51
Data Analysis .....	51
Reliability and Validity.....	53
Reliability.....	53
Validity .....	54

Transition and Summary.....	55
<b>Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Social</b>	
Change .....	56
Introduction.....	56
Presentation of the Findings.....	56
Theme 1: Leadership Support.....	57
Theme 2: Effective communication.....	59
Theme 3: Recognition and reward.....	60
Application to Professional Practice.....	61
Implications for Social Change.....	63
Recommendations for Action .....	64
Recommendations for Further Research.....	65
Reflections .....	66
Conclusions.....	67
References.....	68
Appendix A: Interview Questions .....	91
Appendix B: Site Permission Letter .....	92
Appendix C: Invitation to Participate in the Study.....	94

List of Tables

Table 1. Literature Review Source Content..... 10

List of Figures

Figure 1. The employee engagement framework .....6

## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Engaging employees in the workplace is essential for a small business to be successful (Mishra, Boynton, & Mishra, 2014). Employees who are engaged in their organization demonstrate an increase in organizational performance and stakeholder value that includes gains in productivity, profitability, customer reliability, and satisfaction (Purcell, 2014). More than 78% of U.S. small business managers recognize that employee engagement is one of the ways to achieve organizational success (Galagan, 2015).

### **Background of the Problem**

For an organization to be productive, employees must engage in their work (Anitha, 2014). In the United States, less than 33% of employees in the workplace are engaged (Adkins, 2016; Watson, 2015). Business leaders recognize that a high-performing workforce is essential for the growth and survival of an organization (Nasomboon, 2014). However, small business managers have been unable to determine the reasons for lower employee engagement in their organization, which can negatively affect productivity (Mishra et al., 2014). Researchers have found that many organizational leaders have no employee engagement strategy (Herminingsih, 2017). Some researchers have the opinion that business managers need to acknowledge and understand the strategy that encourages employee engagement in an organization (Albrecht, Bakker, Gruman, Macey, & Saks, 2015). Many factors such as leadership support, reward and recognition are responsible for influencing employee engagement; there has been no consensus yet among researchers as to which is most important

(Herminingsih, 2017). Employee engagement has a significant effect on employees productivity (Nasomboon, 2014). In this study, I used a qualitative single case study approach to determine strategies business managers use to engage employees and increase productivity in the chemical industry.

### **Problem Statement**

Since 2000, there has been a consistent decline in employee engagement in the workplace in most U.S. businesses (Anitha, 2014). Bhattacharya (2015) wrote that the lack of employee engagement is one of the leading causes of lost productivity in the United States, estimated to cost organizations between \$450 to \$550 billion per year. The general business problem is that scarcity of employee engagement negatively impacts organizational productivity. The specific business problem is that some chemical industry managers lack strategies to engage employees and increase productivity.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of the qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies that some business managers in the chemical industry use to engage employees and increase productivity. The population for the study consisted of five chemical business managers from a small chemical company in the northeastern United States area that has demonstrated success in engaging employees.

My research may result in social change by informing managers seeking to create or revise engagement techniques that may lead to increased employee engagement, which may result in a reduction of employee turnover rates also increasing local business. The information from the study may lead to social change because when employees are

engaged, they will perform to their potential capacity, which could increase employees job satisfaction and positively affect the employees' lives, their families, and their communities.

### **Nature of the Study**

The three research methodologies that I considered for this study were quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. The qualitative method involves considering in-depth, non-numerical data, which includes interview participants to dive deeper into the problem (Nour, 2014). The qualitative method was appropriate for the study because researchers use the qualitative method to analyze a problem by determining useful meaning from individual or group perspectives within specific frameworks (Nour, 2014).

The quantitative method involves numerical data gathering and statistical data in the examination of variables (Yin, 2014). I did not select the quantitative method for the study because the intent of the study was not to examine the statistical relationship between variables.

The mixed-methods approach involves using elements of both quantitative and qualitative methods in a research study (Shneerson & Gale, 2015). I did not select mixed-methods due to the inclusion of quantitative inquiry.

Within qualitative methodology, the three designs I considered were (a) case study, (b) phenomenology, and (c) ethnography. A research design is used to construct a study framework with which to pursue answers to research questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). A case study design allows a researcher to explore a phenomenon using

multiple sources of data (Yin, 2014). I chose a case study design to explore strategies that managers in the chemical industry use to engage employees and increase productivity.

Phenomenology involves researching a small group of people intensively over an extended period (Marshall & Rossman, 2014), which was not the intent of this study because such an approach might consume excessive time and resources. An ethnographic design is used to study a sociocultural group (Lewis, 2015). Ethnography was not employed in the study because an ethnographic design focuses on describing a culture's characteristics, which was not the intent of the study.

### **Research Question**

The central research question for the study was the following: What are the strategies that some business managers in the chemical industry use to engage employees and increase productivity?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What strategies do you use to engage employees and increase productivity in your organization?
2. What strategies do you believe have increased productivity?
3. What strategies of those you mentioned would you employ gain?
4. What engagement challenges do you encounter in your organization?
5. How do you measure employee engagement to improve performance?
6. What additional comments you would like to share regarding employee engagement?



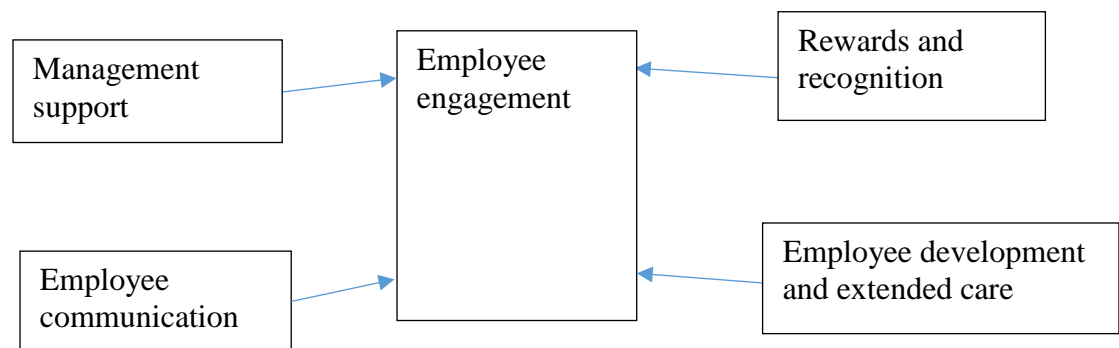
## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the study was social exchange theory (SET). Homans introduced SET in 1958 as a framework for understanding how to keep employees engaged in the workplace to increase employee productivity (AbuKhalifeh & Som, 2013). The SET is extensively used in business, has served as a theoretical foundation for explanations of various situations in business practice, and has contributed to the study of employee engagement.

Many researchers used SET to determine a range of factors that can increase employee engagement as well as to demonstrate important strategies that a manager can use to engage the workforce in an organization (AbuKhalifeh & Som, 2013; Saks, 2017). Homans explained SET in terms of an exchange of activity in the workplace that involves rewards or benefits exchanged between employees and employers to increase workforce performance (Cropanzano, Anthony, Daniels, & Hall, 2016). The SET is useful in explaining why some employees are less engaged in their work and organization (AbuKhalifeh & Som, 2013).

Figure 1 depicts antecedents for employee engagement. Employee engagement can be achieved through four determinant factors: (a) management support, (b) employee communication, (c) rewards and recognition, and (d) employee development and extended care. The more effective that organizations are in each of these areas, the more engaged their employees are likely to be (AbuKhalifeh & Som, 2013). The determinant factor may influence employee performance with desired results when employees are engaged.

The SET was applicable to this study because I sought an understanding of how business managers use strategies to increase employee engagement in their organizations. Employee performance consists of concepts that are associated with management strategies to improve engagement in the workplace. Participant feedback from this research may help in explaining the methods that small business managers use to engage employees and improve organizational productivity. The SET framework is depicted below in Figure 1:



*Figure 1.* The SET framework.

### **Operational Definitions**

Researchers describe technical terms as they appear in a study (Landrum & Garza, 2015). An operational definition indicates how a concept used in a study relates to other key ideas (Nour, 2014). The operational definitions could be measurable variables that add credibility to the methodology and to ensure the reproducibility of the results (Yin, 2014).

*Employee engagement:* Employee engagement is the process for motivating people to work within their company (Nasomboon, 2014).

*Employee productivity:* Employee productivity is the inputs per person or system that generates an output within a period that measures productivity and profitability for an organization (Anitha, 2014).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

Assumptions are specific information that a researcher believes to be true for a study but for which the researcher does not have concrete evidence (Valentin, 2014). Research limitations are inherent weaknesses of a study that are outside the researcher's control (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Delimitations are features that determine the scope and the boundaries of an investigation (Edwards & Knowles, 2014). A study's delimitations, which are within the researcher's control, may include the objectives of the study, the research questions, the theoretical framework, and the selected population for the examination (Edwards & Knowles, 2014).

#### **Assumptions**

For this study, I made two assumptions. My first assumption was that interested participants answered all interview questions honestly. My second assumption was that interested participants remembered enough information to contribute useful data.

#### **Limitations**

In this study, there were two limitations. The first limitation was the company selected may not be representative of the similar companies in other areas, and that a company in the chemical industry may not be representative of companies in other industries. The second limitation was sample size; a sample of five chemical company

managers may not turn out to be representative of the entire chemical industry managers within the area.

### **Delimitations**

There were two delimitations for the study. The first delimitation was the geographical area of the study, which included chemical industry managers in the northeastern United States area. The second delimitation was the study population. I selected five managers from a single business, which involved lower through middle-level small business managers from a chemical organization.

### **Significance of the Study**

This research may be of value to enterprises because an engaged workforce could boost corporate performance. Researchers have written that high-involvement work practices might lead to positive ideas and beliefs linked to employee engagement (Rana, 2015). Engaging employees in important work practices could enhance employee performance, which could result in increased organizational productivity (Sacher & Lal, 2016; Zhang, Avery, Bergsteiner, & More, 2014).

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

This study may contribute to the effective practice of business by providing information on strategies that business leaders may use to improve employee engagement. The study may offer insight into means to enhance organizational productivity and sustainability through employee engagement. Efforts to engage employees may increase innovation, productivity, and bottom-line performance while

reducing costs related to hiring and retention in highly competitive talent markets (Mishra et al., 2014; Sacher & Lal, 2016).

### **Implications for Social Change**

The study may contribute to positive social change by helping all businesses and agencies to become productive through better employee engagement in the workplace. Readers may gain a stronger understanding of strategic management opportunities to improve employee engagement and productivity. The findings from this study may support social change by helping small business managers to engage their employees, which may lead to lower employee turnover rates and ensure a long-term, feasible, sustainable, and healthy economy within firms in the community.

### **A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the strategies some business managers use to engage employees and increase productivity. An extensive search of over 150 scholarly, peer-reviewed literature and dissertations yielded sufficient materials relevant to the topic of the employee engagement. The databases searched included *ProQuest*, *Google Scholar*, *EBSCOhost*, and *Emerald Management Journals*, in addition to government websites and databases.

The organization of the literature review includes four employee engagement determinant factors: (a) management support, (b) employee communication, (c) reward and recognition, and (d) employee development and extended care. Researchers such as AbuKhalifeh and Som (2013), Purcell (2014), and Shantz, Alfes, and Latham (2014)

provided the foundation and support for this study. The literature I reviewed is relevant to the impact leaders who use employee engagement strategies have on productivity.

The strategy for searching employee engagement literature included the review of literature related to employee engagement in improving productivity. The research strategy included an in-depth investigation, analysis, and dialogue with information relating to the research question for the study. The research question for the study is the following: What are the strategies that some business managers in the chemical industry use to engage employees and increase productivity? Therefore, *employee job engagement, employee job satisfaction, management strategies, qualitative research, leadership style, reward and recognition, employee job motivation, employee communication, and DBA case studies* were the key research terms I explored for this qualitative case study. Subtopics reviewed included: work-life balance, career development, work environment and teamwork, and co-worker relationship.

The use of research portals resulted in the identification of 85% of the peer-reviewed articles I retrieved, which includes the review of 157 references, of which all were peer-reviewed. Four non-peer-reviewed web searches were also part of the search process, along with 140 peer-reviewed journal articles, and seven books. Eighty-eight percent of the total sources published are less than 5-years from the anticipated graduation date of August 2018.

Table 1. *Literature Review Source Content*

Literature Review Content	Total #	# Less than 5 years old at graduation date	% Total peer-reviewed less than 5 years old at graduation date
Peer-reviewed Journals	157	140	89%
Book	7	7	100%
Non-peer reviewed Journals	0	0	0%
Older Articles	19	0	0%
Total	157	147	

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies chemical industry managers use to engage employees and increase productivity. To gain knowledge about employee engagement, the researcher must understand the determinant factors that influence engagement, which may positively increase productivity in an organization and the performance of the business (AbuKhalifeh & Som, 2013). The SET provided the conceptual framework for the study, which I used to examine related concepts in the literature review.

### **Social Exchange Theory**

The conceptual framework for the study was the SET, developed by Homans (1958). Compared to other engagement theories such as motivation and leader-member exchange (LMX) theories, SET provides a general, stronger approach to a broad pattern of business background regarding engagement (Neuhofer, Reindl, & Kittel, 2016). Motivation theory is used to understand a reason for individuals' actions, and desires, otherwise what motivates people to behave how they do (Elliot, Dweck, & Yeager, 2017). According to Northouse (2015), LMX theory is helpful when there is constant

interaction between the leader and subordinate (such as a working manager).

AbuKhalifeh and Som (2013) pointed out that SET addresses various issues about engagement in both academic and professional environments.

Homans (1958) defined SET as the exchange of noticeable and unnoticeable activities that reward or benefit at least two parties. SET is used in the various businesses to propose a two-sided, reciprocally contingent, and rewarding process involving activities, which could lead to engagement (Cropanzano et al., 2016). Scholars describe engagement as a two-way interaction relationship between employee and employer in the way of employees repaying organization by the level of their engagement (Neuhof et al., 2016; Saks, 2006). Employee engagement consists of an active connection between employees and management, which could turn into negative or positive employee engagement at work (Alfes, Shantz, Truss, & Soane, 2013).

**The evolution of the social exchange theory.** SET began in businesses that emphasize on many of the main rules found in rational choice theory and structuralism to improve productivity (AbuKhalifeh & Som, 2013). SET when used as a potential framework for many organizations, allows leaders to foster reciprocal interdependence among employees and managers (Rana, 2015). Reciprocal relationships emphasize contingent interpersonal transactions, whereby an action of one party leads to a response by another (Cropanzano et al., 2016).

Homans introduced SET in 1958 in focusing on business interactions and relationships as an exchange between two people (Saks, 2006). AbuKhalifeh and Som (2013) stated that SET was formed using a personal benefit analysis and the measurement



of alternatives. AbuKhalifeh and Som noted that SET provides a theoretical basis that explains why employees prefer to become engaged in their work. The SET is a theory that Neuhofer et al. (2016) used to examine how responsibilities form through many interactions between parties who are in a state of mutual interdependence. The principle of SET is that relationships develop over time into trusting, loyal, and mutual agreements between the parties, which could lead to engagement.

Rana (2015) noted that one of the best ways for employees to repay their employers is through their levels of engagement. Employees will decide to engage themselves on a different level as an answer to the resources they obtain from their employers (Saks, 2017). Even with the usefulness of SET framework, systemic difficulties could be a challenge such as relationships between two people, when some relationships go backwards in terms of intimacy. When using SET as a conceptual framework, critical theoretical variables may be left out such as group gain, status consistency, and competition, and some formulation of SET may be vague, which could lead to vagueness present in a model difficult to test (Cropanzano et al., 2016). However, as I was interested in how engagement adds to productivity, SET was the most useful theory for my study.

Homans' effort was to focus on elementary employee performance that could influence engagement in the work environment (Saks, 2017). Neuhofer et al. (2016) pointed out that Homans developed SET theory in five fundamental propositions, which help in structuring people performances based on associated benefits and rewards: success proposition, stimulus proposition, value proposition, deprivation-satiation

proposition, and value proposition. The position of theoretical approaches represents the focus of Homans's literature of SET.

**Success proposition.** Success proposition is when people receive rewards for actions they perform, which causes them to repeat the action (Homans, 1958). Leaders that use success proposition cause an action that procures results through engagement in the following sequence of events: (a) a person, action, or act of engaging; (b) a rewarding result; and (c) a repetition of the initial action. The success proposition consists of the implication that the constant increase of reward will lead to a regular increase of action; however, increase in reward cannot be indefinite (Cropanzano, Anthony, Daniels, & Hall, 2014).

Leaders who use the success proposition have found that the less frequently an action is rewarded, the less it will be repeated (Cropanzano et al., 2014). When an action is not continuously rewarded, a person tends to perform less or not at all (Mitchell, Cropanzano, & Quisenberry, 2012). However, a single time reward for an action performed may be enough to reinstate the action at full strength (Mitchell et al., 2012). Managers who use the success proposition, therefore, may increase productivity.

**Stimulus proposition.** Stimulus proposition is the second general proposition examined by Homans. When actions were repeated relating to a stimulus result in the past, the more likely the person will respond to it (Mitchell et al., 2012). Stimulus proposition is when leaders reinforce stimulus at the degree of similarity between the present stimuli and past rewarded actions an individual performed (Cropanzano et al., 2014). The similarity depends on pattern methods in which persons differentiate, or

generalize across, combinations of stimuli. As such, how people perceive and reason is as important as the results they achieve. This is also true of other types of performance that influence engagement (Mitchell et al., 2012).

**Value proposition.** Scholars recommended that employee value proposition is essential to develop stronger employees and keep them engaged in a workplace (Neuhofer et al., 2016; Saks, 2006). Neuhofer et al. (2016) and Saks (2017) proved that organizations and managers who build their workforce through employee value proposition have the higher chance of engaging the employee (AbuKhalifeh & Som, 2013). The employee value proposition consists of a description of different employee policies, benefits programs, and programs rewards, which could enhance engagement (Neuhofer et al., 2016).

**Deprivation–satiation proposition.** Deprivation-satiation proposition is a plan that involves rewarding or punishing based on the values weighted at a positive or negative value (Cropanzano et al., 2014). The more a person receives a reward, the less they appreciate that compensation (Neuhofer et al., 2016). Therefore, there are some imperceptible and perfect rewards that people will value, except lower needs are met (Mitchell et al., 2012).

**Emotions propositions.** Emotions propositions occur when there are different reward conditions. Homans (1958) discussed the emotions proposition by stating that those who receive more than they expect will be happy, engage, and increase performance. The affect theory of social exchange explains how the conditions of exchanges improve relational and group relationships through feelings and engagement to

be more productive (Rana, 2015). There are five arguments Homans (1958) presented for this theory below:

The first argument is that the emotions in people who have some benefits depend on the performance of each person (Homans, 1958). The second argument is that people understand social exchange in relationships among partners and groups. The third argument is the mode of exchange a leader determines to be the feature of the exchange responsibility and the inspirations that connected to peoples' feelings. The fourth argument is about the attribution of emotion that results from different exchange models that impact partners or groups. The fifth argument is about how repeated exchanges allow for positive interactions between engaged partners, such as employee and managers (Homans, 1958).

Other scholars, such as Blau and Emerson, continued to write about Homans's theory and conceived SET theory as the primary theory to be used within diverse business sectors (Neuhofer et al., 2016). Neuhofer's research on SET compared employee performance with the business performance. In relating to Blau's concept, every individual always tries to maximize their performance, as the SET process allows leaders to satisfy their employees (Mitchell et al., 2012). Therefore, SET is the connection between two parties that trust each other, not a legal obligation. It is more flexible and rarely involves explicit bargaining (Mitchell et al., 2012).

The involved parties in social exchange take responsibility for each other and depend on the relationship (Mitchell et al., 2012). These elements could be the time used by an individual engaging in an activity, which could be a negative value to the person if

there is no benefit or reward associated with the time invested in the specific tasks (Jiang & Men, 2015). The rewards or benefits are the positive value, which could be a sense of acceptance, support, and companionship (Mitchell et al., 2012). The value of the relationships between the parties may influence the employee engagement.

Homans' stressed that individual performance is a shared responsibility and one in which participants interact with one another (Neuhofer et al., 2016). According to Neuhofer, Homans focused his studies on the dyadic exchange and formed the foundation for the theoretical study of other important business theories such as leadership, distributive integrity, balance, status, authority, power, and solidarity. Homans' study was too reductionist; that is, Homans took the principles of mindset as the basis for engagement and analyzed the engagement determinant factors in sub-recognized level (Mitchell et al., 2012).

Researchers such as Neuhofer et al. (2016) and Mitchell et al. (2012) confirmed that history has shown that traditional principles of exchange give high focus to the business factors that drive engagement as people attempt to achieve what is valuable and desirable to them (Mitchell et al., 2012). Mitchell et al. explained SET when dealing with interpersonal relationships. Mitchell et al. described the following three interpersonal relationships: (a) principles that emphasize how to develop relationships, (b) principles that focus on the attributes of the relationship, and (c) principles that defined the feature relationship as engagement, and connection under exchange commodities.

SET can also be thought of as self-interested motives regarding rewards and punishments and development of management to support employees in engagement to

improve performance (Mitchell et al., 2012). SET is an appropriate theory for employee engagement in the workplace. Researchers used the SET to study employee engagement in the workplace (AbuKhalifeh & Som, 2013). SET is a stronger theoretical basis that explains employee engagement (Saks, 2017). The SET is about the relationships developed over time into trusting, loyal, and mutual commitments if the involved parties stand by the rules of exchange (Cropanzano et al., 2016).

### **Alternative Theories**

Kahn (1990) was the first author who defined employee engagement in a study on the psychological condition of personal engagement, and disengagement within the workplace. Employee engagement is the level to which an employee is willing to engage in company activity, and accomplish the organization's goals. Employees engage as they connect themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally, into their work responsibility, and task performances (Kahn, 1990). Disengaged employees withdrew themselves from the physical, emotional, and knowledgeable aspects of work activities (Kahn, 1990).

Other researchers, did not dispute employee engagement defined by Kahn with causing the existence of many other employee engagement definitions (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014; Nasomboon, 2014). Kahn's (1990) model is relevant to theories of people performance that used for employee engagement in the workplace. Kahn indicated that immediate engagement, employment promotes the physical, emotional, and experienced connections to work performances, which will allow the employee to express their chosen task performance.

**Employee engagement theory.** The employee engagement theory is all about three psychological conditions of (a) meaningfulness, (b) safety, and (c) availability (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Kahn's theory found to be an explanation of engagement based on the evidence that depends on psychological conditions in getting employees to engage or disengage at a place of work. Employees develop engagement when they have a sense of meaningfulness, safety, and availability (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Kahn's theory is not an appropriate theory for the study because this study is business research, not psychological research.

**Expectancy theory.** In comparison, many researchers used expectancy theory developed by Vroom to understand the personal motivation that influences employee engagement in the workplace (Vroom, 1964). Ferinia, Yuniarsi, and Disman (2016) stated that there is a relationship between personal effort, performance, and rewards that could lead to employee satisfaction and engagement. However, when organizations did not meet employee expectations, it may result in low performance (Faleye & Trahan, 2011).

The application of expectancy theory is inadequate, as a reward is not linked directly with performance in many organizations (Barron & Hulleman, 2015). Influencing employee engagement could be related to other parameters also such as position, effort, responsibility, education, and others. Therefore, other leadership styles and motivation skills are needed as well as the use of other theories for improving employee engagement within an organization.

**Self-determination theory.** Self-determination theory (SDT) is another theory used by researchers in studying employee engagement (Deci & Ryan, 2015). SDT shows the level at which an individual's comporment is self-motivated and self-determined. The SDT theory is all about how people are motivated and are engaged in processes without any external influence, and interference. Leaders use self-determination theory as a reference to a framework that supports three basic human needs that must be satisfied to encourage people performance, health, and well-being (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

According to Olafsen, Halvari, Forest, and Deci (2015), SDT is a broad motivational theory that addresses various issues about engagement in both academic and professional environments. Researchers have used SDT, to determine how motivation influences people engagement and demonstrates its significance in the organizational (Deci & Ryan, 2015). Self-determination theory is a theory of work motivation relevant to intrinsic motivation of individuals who desire personal growth independently pushed toward achieving self-defined goals (Deci & Ryan, 2015). Unfortunately, leaders that use this theory fail to provide any benefit for people to become self-motivated (Olafsen et al., 2015). Therefore, the key concepts underlying the SET are appropriate, related, and self-sufficient for employee engagement (Saks, 2006).

### **Employee Engagement: Topical Foundation**

Shuck and Reio (2014) stated that employee engagement is an employee's positive or negative emotional state associated with their job, coworkers, and organization. An engaged employee is a person who is involved, enthusiastic, or committed to organization's goals and values (Bakker, Demerouti, & Sanz-Vergel, 2014).



Anitha (2014) described people in the workplace as three types: engaged employees, non-engaged employees, and actively disengaged employees. Engaged employees are the employees who consistently strive to give excellence in their roles. Non engaged employees focus on the tasks spelled out to them rather than the goals of the organization but do perform what they are told to do. Actively disengaged employees are dangerous individuals who not only fail to perform well but are also demotivated and have a lack of interest in their role in a workplace (Anitha, 2014).

Slack, Corlett, and Morris (2014) used the SET to explore employee engagement and CSR. Slack et al. conducted a solitary case study to investigate employee engagement in a United Kingdom energy plant. Slack et al. used employed SET theory to examine the desire that individual employees have towards engagement with CSR activities and to study the relationships of a specific business, between an organization and its employee's engagement with CSR activities (Leary et al., 2013).

Engaged employees are identified and activated by attentive, knowledgeable managers (Leary et al., 2013). Engaged employees are willing to do more for the team (Leary et al., 2013; Nasomboon, 2014). When employees understand their responsibility, expectations, and have the means of completing their work most managers present opportunities for growth (Wang, Sui, Luthans, Wang, & Wu, 2014). Engaged employees are more productive, profitable, safer, healthier, and likely to stay with their employer (Zhang et al., 2014). Albdour and Altarawneh (2014) revealed that frontline employees who are present in organizational engagement activities commit to the business. Employees who are engaged have increased performance (Zhang et al., 2014).

## **Employee Engagement versus Job Satisfaction**

Job satisfaction is how an employee feels about their job, work environment, pay, and benefits that affect their performance (Herminingsih, 2017). Job satisfaction is an employee's emotional reaction to occupation based on a range of factors (Pouramini & Fayyazi, 2015). While employee engagement is the individual's feeling of satisfaction and enthusiasm in work-related task and activities in an organization, there is a link between job satisfaction and employee engagement as job satisfaction may influence employee engagement that could enhance organizational productivity and sustainability (Nasomboon, 2014; Top, Akdere, & Tarcan, 2014).

Hytti, Kautonen, and Akola (2013) identified various benefits of job satisfaction and organizational performance. Employers determine employees' needs, creating a sense of engagement such as work and life balance, and empowerment to make decisions (Shuck & Reio, 2014). Pouramini and Fayyazi (2015) found a relationship between job satisfaction, organizational growth, individual performance, employee productivity and customer satisfaction (Albrecht et al., 2015; Hytti et al., 2013). Leary et al. (2013) wrote that there is a relationship among effective leadership, employee engagement, and job satisfaction. Therefore, job satisfaction may contribute to an employee's willingness to engage in the organizational tasks and activities, which could result in high productivity (Lysova, Richardson, Khapova, & Jansen, 2015).

Mishra et al. (2014) posited that to promote employee engagement is to provide adequate training and interactive communication. Pokorny (2013) found designing reward and recognition programs may enhance performance. Matsuo (2015) indicated

that leaders' skills assist in improving the employees' ability to learn (Schwarz, 2017).

Leaders' help their subordinates to understand the meaning of tasks and goals, encourage subordinates to think and complete their duties themselves and to accept ideas from subordinates (Matsuo, 2015).

A manager sees higher performance rates when engaging their employees (Shantz et al., 2014). Shantz et al. (2014) discussed that researchers highlight the elements a leader should master to drive employee engagement within an organization. Motivating employees, training, communication, and the ability for an employee to make a major decision are indicators of superior performance (Men & Stacks, 2014; Mishra et al., 2014).

### **Determinants of Employee Engagement**

Employee engagement determinants are concepts that influence employees to engage in the workplace (Pandita & Bedarkar, 2015). Employee engagement determinants include training and career development, work-life balance, environment, leadership, stakeholder involvement, teams, and co-worker relationships (Anitha, 2014; Nasomboon, 2014). Anitha noted these determinants impact employee engagement on employee performance, productivity as well as organizational performance.

**Career development.** Job performance and focus on other work values affect high levels of employee engagement in the organizational (Lysova et al., 2015). Alternatively, the passive career performance and self-centered work values influence employees' lower levels of involvement in the change initiative (Akkermans, Brenninkmeijer, Schaufeli, & Blonk, 2015). Khoreva (2016) used SET theory to conduct

a study among 332 high-potential employees in eight multinational businesses to determine the relationships between managers and employees. Khoreva concluded that there was significant work engagement among employee participants in career and leadership development. Lysova et al. (2015) found that career identity influences both how employees view organizational productiveness and their willingness to engage in the transformation process.

**Training and development.** Training is an important tool for managers to develop the employees and engage them in their daily tasks (Mishra et al., 2014). Creating a training program is essential to close the training gaps and to improve the strength of the employees to achieve high performance (Matsuo, 2015). Developing standards with appropriate training results in employee engagement and performance (Georgiades, 2015b). Training workers may contribute to employee performance and productivity. Well trained and coached employees will have the higher possibility of taking ownership of the job, which might improve employee engagement (Georgiades, 2015b). The employee confidence will increase with the adequate training, coaching program, which will result in job engagement and engaged employees are more likely to retain their jobs (Shantz et al., 2014).

**Work–life balance.** There is a link between work-life balance and employee work engagement in the workplace could enhance productivity. Pawar (2013) pointed out that keys to employee engagement could be both functional and emotional factors (Coenen & Kok, 2014). Scholars argue that employers that provide benefit programs have a positive and negative effect on the workforce (Kittipichai, Arsa, Jirapongsuwan, &

Singhakant, 2014; Pawar, 2013). According to Kittipichai et al. (2014), when employers institute work-life balances like family-friendly policies and telework, there is a positive benefit for the employee.

In contrast, the significance of work-life engagement is disadvantageous to both the organization and its employees (Jiang & Men, 2015). The challenge of balancing work and life illustrates the various ways and degrees among the workforce that is discriminatory (Deery & Jago, 2015). According to Deery and Jago (2015), work-life balances are of more benefit to women (e.g., they are mothers, and usually the primary care provider for their children). Das and Khushwah (2015) supported the work-life theory and wrote that the theory should apply to male and female to manage both personal life and professional responsibility to promote productivity (Sacher & Lal, 2016).

Men also have difficulty in finding a balance between their personal and job responsibilities (Das & Khushwah, 2015). Managers that effectively implement work-life balance policies provide an opportunity for work flexibility in balancing an employee's day with both personal and professional responsibilities (Coenen & Kok, 2014). When an employee has the work-life balance, they tend to get more engaged in their work-related activities (Coenen & Kok, 2014).

**Work environment.** Work environment was found to be one of the significant factors that determine the level in which managers engage employees (Karanges, Johnston, Beatson, & Lings, 2015). A positive work environment also drives Millennials' to take on additional responsibility and participate in work activities. Breevaart, Bakker,

Demerouti, and van den Heuvel (2015) revealed that there is a relationship between employee engagement and working environment, as the work environment indirectly develops an involvement in the organization activities improving productivity. Therefore, a meaningful workplace environment could aid employee engagement in work, and interpersonal communication enhances employee engagement (Karanges et al., 2015; Oswick, 2015).

**Compensation.** Many researchers describe compensation as a way of encouraging productivity in the work environment. Compensation is a key element for employees to perform well and engage with the job to be productive in an organization (Hlanganipai & Mazanai, 2014). Employees are attracted to recognition, which increases motivation and performance (Albdour & Altarawneh, 2014; Hlanganipai & Mazanai, 2014). Brown (2014) indicated that compensation includes (a) salary increases, (b) employee benefits, (c) perquisites, and (d) short-term incentives as well as long-term incentives.

Brown (2014) found there are other forms of rewards that include compensation programs offered by the employer, which consist of:

1. Merit raises
2. Bonuses
3. Spot award rewards
4. Tuition reimbursement
5. Training
6. Benefits (i.e., gift cards, and stock options)

Employees tend to be more productive and engaged when compensation is appropriate to their job responsibilities (Hlanganipai & Mazanai, 2014). Minhat and Abdullah (2014) noted that fairness in compensation amongst employees might increase the employees' level of engagement, enhance performance, and close the income gap among employees. Kim (2014) confirmed that organizational leaders that have the different opportunities of compensating employees might be able to engage and retain said employees for a long time.

**Team relationships.** Researchers emphasize team relationships as another determining factor of employee engagement. Lages (2012) investigated over 700 frontline service employees to determine the drivers of work expression in agreement with employee attitudes. Lages concluded that firms should develop practices that encourage workgroup support and organizational commitment as team relationships enhance employee's morale. Thus, if the employee has good relationships with their team and coworkers, work engagement is expected to be high (Anitha, 2014).

Lages (2012) discussed that the team and co-worker relationship is not the only determining factor in employee engagement. Though it may contribute to strategies that manager could use in enhancing employee engagement to improve productivity in an organization; it is important to investigate the determinant factors that affect employees. There are many methods to promote worker engagement without a particular approach that fits all organizations. Each organizational leader may define employee engagement as it is appropriate for their industry standard (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014).

## **Engagement Strategies**

**Management support.** Researchers define management as a process where individual influences a group of the workforce to achieve a corporate goal (Schwarz, 2017; Top et al., 2014). Effective managers achieve goals that directly affect their employees (Popli & Rizvi, 2015). Biswas, Varma, and Ramaswami (2013) conducted a field study in the manufacturing and service division businesses in India. Biswas et al. examined the relationships between distributive justice and employee engagement through SET. Biswas et al. found that management support of frontline workers is essential to understanding the factors that may lead to high levels of employee engagement.

To manage the workforce, it is necessary to improve and implement changes when necessary in the employee engagement process (Kim, 2014). Managers realize that they must determine the reasons for employee lack of engagement in the workplace that attributed to productivity (Choi, Tran, & Park, 2015). A leader should mobilize, influence, train, and engage their employees to achieve their goals (Mikkelsen, York, & Arritola, 2015). Leadership strategies are essential in encouraging an innovative system in the organization where there is a team environment (Mau, 2016). Effective management is a higher-order, multidimensional construct consisting of self-awareness, the balance of information processing, transparency, and internalized moral standards (Bacha, 2014). A leader who is working toward the success of organizational change needs to add to the value of organizational productivity (Nasomboon, 2014). As



engagement occurs managers' inspire and communicate with subordinates (Georgiades, 2015a).

Brunetto, Shacklock, Teo, and Farr-Wharton (2014) utilized SET to examine and evaluate the impact of the management on workforce engagement. Brunetto et al. collected data from 510 nurses and 193 police officers to investigate similarities and differences between nursing and policing work circumstances. Brunetto et al. noted that both samples indicated engagement and well-being affected employee productivity.

**Leadership involvement.** Management involvement plays a significant role in employee engagement and overall business success (Men & Stacks, 2014). When an employee's work is relevant and meaningful, it leads to their interest, and commitment to an organization (Anthony & Weide, 2015). Authentic and supportive leadership impact engagement by increasing their involvement, satisfaction, and interest in the work (Men & Stacks, 2014). What effect managers have on employees is essential in enhancing productivity as the relationship with a direct manager can have an impact on individual perceptions in the workplace (Nasomboon, 2014). However, there is a gap in understanding what strategies leaders use to influence employee engagement and encourage culture development in their organization (Carasco-Saul, Kim, & Kim, 2015).

**Leadership style.** Leadership style is the mode and strategy of providing guidance, implementing plans, and engaging individuals (Matsuo, 2015; Toban, Gani, Gani, & Zakaria, 2014). Scholars have developed numerous leadership theories to define the characteristics, traits, and leadership styles that could enhance employee engagement (Schwarz, 2017). Alfes et al. (2013) used the SET framework in investigating the

relationship between employees and their line manager in a service sector organization. Alfes et al. found that using the SET in their study exposed the effect of outward leadership practices on the employee engagement. The relationship between employees' and managers by providing organizational support and LMX will improve employee engagement (Alfes et al., 2013).

The employer-employee relationship is vital to cultivating engagement within an organization. Toban et al. (2014) wrote that leadership styles must align with the mission of the organization vision. Schwarz (2017) noted that transformational leadership style is a reliable technique for driving workers' engagement, job satisfaction, and productivity.

Popli and Rizvi (2016) defined transformational leadership as a process that occurs when one or a group of persons engages with one another in a way, which promotes engagement. Thus, integrating the structure of transformational leader and follower needs provides relevant insight into employee engagement in an organization (Schwarz, 2017). Transformational leaders could improve employee engagement, motivate, and empower followers (Top et al., 2014).

A team member can do little to improve their engagement under the transactional leadership (Choi et al., 2015). Transactional leadership style limits the leader to use reward-based performances into attaining higher performance from employees (Popli & Rizvi, 2016). Wang et al. (2014) stated that authentic leadership is the basic component of effective leadership. Jiang and Men (2015) wrote that there is a link between authentic leadership, manager behavioral integrity, and employee engagement. An authentic leader

enables higher relationship leading to energetic employee engagement in the workplace, and enhance job performance (Wang et al., 2014).

Researchers found an exceptional commitment to leadership and employee engagement can contribute to organizational performance, and the survival of an organization (Kim, 2014; Schwarz, 2017). Despite the number of employee engagement studies, organizational managers rank employee engagement as one of their top priorities (Cesário & Chambel, 2017; Popli & Rizvi, 2015). However, some business managers still lack strategies to engage their employees in influencing productivity.

### **Employee Communication**

The ability of management to communicate effectively creates a basis for employee engagement (Georgiades, 2015a; Jevé, Oppenheimer, & Konje, 2015). Jaupi and Llaci (2015) wrote that lack of or poor communication is one of the most common problems within an organization. The proper relationship among workers and leaders requires consistent and honest communication (Basbous & Malkawi, 2017).

Jaupi and Llaci (2015) found the frontline and upper management of the organizations who communicate effectively, strongly impact employee engagement. Georgiades (2015a) noted that the fundamental idea of internal communication is to improve productivity by changing the performance of all employees, including managers. Albrecht et al. (2015) examined the effect a manager's feedback, and support has on engagement and communication. Albrecht et al. found continuous communication and exchange of ideas between employees and leadership enhance employee engagement with an organization.

**Effective employee communication.** Effective employee communication aids employees to understand their role and influence in the workplace (Jaupi & Llaci, 2015). Frontline managers recognize that poor communication is the most common problem in both small and large businesses (Georgiades, 2015a). When employees are continuously informed about organizational activities, employees will feel valued and more involved with the job assignment, which will drive productivity (Basbous & Malkawi, 2017). When employees are well-informed with a clear set of goals, teams are more inclined to engage with each other (Han, Bonn, & Cho, 2016; Jevic et al., 2015). The employees then remain engaged when they have all the tools to do their job, such as training and stakeholder development (Georgiades, 2015a).

**Professional development.** Academic scholars identified training and career development as another significant factor that could improve employee engagement since it helps the employees to concentrate on roles and responsibility (Rama Devi, 2009). Kennett (2013) wrote that there is a relationship between training and employee engagement. Ahmed, Phulpoto, Umrani, and Abbas (2015) found that training has a positive impact on individuals, leaders, and all industries in which employees engage.

Employees to modify their behavior and emotions to improve their abilities and competencies when adequately trained (Kennett, 2013). Having more skills that are available through training contributes to employee involvement in the achievement of organizational goals (Ahmed et al., 2015). Ahmed et al. (2015) argued that employee training can significantly enhance employee engagement. Leadership training adds to

employee engagement and improves productivity within organizations (Ahmed et al., 2015).

Topa, Guglielmi, and Depolo (2014) suggested that mentoring is another way of training employees that enhances productivity. Adverse experiences with the mentor may affect job satisfaction among employees and their rate of engagement (Topa et al., 2014). However, Topa et al. explained that negative experiences with the mentor could lead to employee initiative.

Organizational policies, procedures, and well-structured internal systems allow leaders determine the length at which employees will engage in company activities. Rama Devi (2009) conducted a study that demonstrated why employee engagement built on a two-way relationship between employer and its workforce. Rama Devi emphasized the importance of organizational policies and procedures that best support flexible work arrangements, and assist in balancing employee work-life balances; organizations that have such provisions are more likely to have engaged employees (Cesário & Chambel, 2017). Additionally, well-written organizational procedures allow employees to gain an understanding of all tools necessary to perform their jobs.

### **Reward and Recognition**

Anitha (2014) confirmed that compensation is an essential attribute to employee engagement that motivates an employee to achieve more while promoting work performance and personal development. Managers recognize it is essential for management to present acceptable standards of remuneration and recognition for their employees to increase productivity (Nasomboon, 2014). In contrast, an incentive profile

does not connect with employees' perceived work satisfaction (Norberg, 2017). Positive incentives influence employees and strengthen their possibility of being productive (Bhattacharya, 2015). Subsequently, workplace well-being is a leadership measure that enhances employee engagement as no metric captures more difference in human performance than well-being (Lages, 2012).

Cerasoli, Nicklin, and Ford (2014) identified incentive motivation as a fundamental determinant of general conduct. Employee motivation is the level of strength, engagement, and inspiration that employees bring to their organization (Caillier, 2014). Business managers recognize the need for strategies to implement employee engagement goals within their organization to promote creativity, profitability, productivity and sustainability (Nimon, Shuck, & Zigarmi, 2015). Caner and Banu (2015) argued that other factors such as social, environmental, and financial factors could help in enhancing employees' engagement. These factors include personal feelings, financial conditions, friends and family, and religion in making decisions.

Gruyter (2014) highlighted other factors that could enhance employee engagement such as communication, trust, transparency, and feeling valued. Gruyter confirmed that these factors promote employee performance and attitudes that improve employee engagement. Mishra et al. (2014) investigated the relationship between employee engagement and business success in pursuing ways to facilitate workers' emotional well-being. Mishra et al. concluded that reward and recognition influence employee engagement and increased productivity. Leadership skills for improving subordinates' ability to learn from the experience, commitment, and how leaders develop

sustainability initiatives is essential for employee engagement (Matsuo, 2015; McClelland & Vogus, 2014).

DeKay (2013) argued that motivational factors can facilitate successful employee engagement and increase organization performance (Pokorny, 2013). Researchers identified two types of motivation as intrinsic and extrinsic (Cerasoli et al., 2014). Clanton (2015) defined extrinsic motivation as the expected organizational rewards and mutual benefit. Intrinsic motivation is to engage in an activity for individual interest, or pleasure and satisfaction derived from the job experience (Cerasoli et al., 2014; Clanton, 2015).

Gagné and Deci (2005) found that an individual's intrinsic task motivation plays a significant role in determining their performance that may result in being productive. Clanton (2015) posited that true motivation must come from intrinsic sources because a group in a natural motivational environment could impact a person's views of self and change their behavior. A manager should infuse intrinsic motivations into most aspects of their teams when desiring a greater commitment to employee engagement (Schlechter, Thompson, & Bussin, 2015).

Some managers believe that extrinsic motivation motivates employees through pay and reward, or an employee's individual fear of punishment (Anthony & Weide, 2015). Ferinia et al. (2016) stated that there is a relationship between personal effort, performance, and rewards that could lead to employee satisfaction and engagement. Faleye and Trahan (2011) argued that when leaders do not meet employee expectations, it may negatively affect employee motivation resulting in employee disengagement.

Employees who are externally motivated to perform duties may attempt to meet their job responsibilities (Anthony & Weide, 2015). However, prizes or awards given to an employee as an extrinsic motivation may be bribing someone into performing a certain action, because compliance is not motivation (Clanton, 2015). Therefore, managers should use motivation methods as needed in conjunction with other strategies to improve employee engagement.

### **Employee Development and Extended Care**

Karatepe (2014) described employee development as an employee's feelings towards the efforts made by their manager to develop their skills. Akkermans et al. (2015) investigated the career skills among young employees that support a link between employee development, career skill, and employee work engagement. Employees need to keep up with a growing number of changes in their workplace and within organizations (Carasco-Saul et al., 2015). When employees take responsibility for their job with support from their managers, there will be an increase in productivity (Carasco-Saul et al., 2015). The managers could use employee development to leverage engagement among their workforces, such as career development (Khoreva, 2016).

Employee development programs may help small business managers understand what they must do to engage their employees in the workplace (Khoreva, 2016). Jackson and Wilton (2016) revealed in their study that employee care is another essential element in achieving high levels of engagement that will lead to organizational productivity. These extended employee care programs include work-life balance, safety, and work environment. Despite the diversity of theoretical insights emerging from different and



related studies, employers still await findings that will transform employees into productive workers who enjoy what they do (DeKay, 2013).

### **Transition**

In Section 1, I presented the background of the problem, problem statement, purpose statement, the nature of the study, research question, and the conceptual framework. Furthermore, Section 1 included operational definitions, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and a review of the extant literature on the topic under study. Section 2 consists of the research process and plans for protecting participants. Section 3 concluded this study with themes and the data, which emerged from the interview process. Section 3 includes recommendations for the use of any information resulting from this research.

## Section 2: The Project

In Section 1, I presented the business problem, which was to determine strategies some business managers use to engage employees and increase productivity in the chemical industry. Section 2 consists of the justifications for selecting a qualitative, case study research methodology and design. There is also a description of the role of the researcher, the participants, data analysis techniques, population and sampling, ethical research, reliability, validity of data, data collection procedures, and a summary.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies that some business managers in the chemical industry use to engage employees and increase productivity. The targeted population for the study consisted of five chemical business managers from a small chemical company in the northeastern United States area that has demonstrated success in engaging employees. My research may result in social change by informing managers seeking to create or revise engagement techniques that may lead to increased employee engagement, which may result in a reduction of employee turnover rates also increasing local business. The information from the study may lead to social change because when employees are engaged, they will perform to their potential capacity, which could increase their job satisfaction and positively affect the employees' lives, their families, and their communities.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher in qualitative studies is an instrument of data collection (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). I served as the primary data collection instrument for this

qualitative case study, garnered the trust of participants using the semistructured interviews, and analyzed the research data to present outcomes. Semistructured interview procedures assist a qualitative researcher to create and prepare the data collection process (Farmer & Lundy, 2017; Sarma, 2015).

Marais (2012) revealed that to mitigate bias, a researcher identifies their assumptions and their personal experiences with the topic and prospective participants before collecting data. I had prior relationships with chemical managers in the northeastern United States area. While this relationship was beneficial to the homogenous sampling method that I used there was no preexisting relationship with individuals participated in this study, so there was no potential for conflict of interest.

Bromley, Mikesell, Jones, and Khodyakov (2015) described the *Belmont Report* (BR) as principles of research including: justice, ethics, and equal participant benefit. In this research, I acted ethically and respected the members of this study in the parameters of the BR. I created trust by following the directions of my chair and committee, and having open communication with prospective participants.

The principles of the BR include respect for the human participants to ensure that researchers meet ethical considerations when conducting the research (Bromley et al., 2015). The researcher should conduct a study that provides adherence to ethical responsibilities (Smith-Merry & Walton, 2014). Adherence to ethical responsibilities includes respect for the participants by following through on commitments (Bevan, 2014). The rationale for the interview protocol was to ensure that ethical guidelines are set to inform the participants of the interview process. The interview protocol ensured the

consistency interview process with all the members to enhance the accuracy and reliability of the data collected.

### **Participants**

The guidelines for who can and cannot participate in a study are the eligibility criteria (Beaver, Ison, & Pazdur, 2017). Having participants with similar characteristics ensures that the results of a study align with the research topic (Lewis, 2015; Streagle & Scott, 2015). The eligibility criteria for study participants of this study were:

- Individuals that are experienced managers who work for a chemical company.
- Have a minimum of 2 years of experience in a managerial position leading workforce.
- Have proven success in employee engagement strategy.

I gained access to participants through the promotion of a partnership rather than a researcher-subject type of relationship, using probing skills to conduct interviews. I gained access to the participants in the selected chemical company, I obtained a letter of consent. After I obtained permission from a vice president of human resources (HR) to work with the leaders of the company, I requested from HR the names and contact information for potential participants that satisfy the eligibility criteria. I used the company website to communicate with potential participants.

Establishing a working relationship with participants is a requirement for the researcher to conduct a successful case study (Bevan, 2014; Johnson, 2014; Yin, 2014). After obtaining the names and phone numbers of potential participants from HR and

company website, I established a working relationship with the participants. The strategies to establish a working relationship with participants included: (a) requesting participation in the planned study using the consent form, (b) contacting potential participants, (c) obtaining an agreement to participate, (d) confirming the eligibility criteria are met, and (e) scheduling the day and time of the face-to-face interviews.

In this study, I used a qualitative research method with single case study design to explore the strategies that some business managers in the chemical industry use to engage employees and increase productivity. Establishing an alignment of the participants' characteristics with the overarching research question involves the participants understanding the criteria to participate in a research study (Johnson, 2014). All selected participants have the essential knowledge regarding strategies that a business manager used to engage employees in increasing productivity to answer the research questions.

### **Research Method and Design**

The three available methods for researchers are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method (Yin, 2014). The selection of the methodology and design for this study originated from the business problem and research question. I selected a qualitative case study to explore strategies used by the manager to engage employees in increasing productivity.

### **Research Method**

I used the qualitative method to conduct this study. I chose to use the qualitative approach because I was interested in strategies used to increase productivity and the best method to do this was the use of qualitative inquiry. Qualitative inquiry falls under the

constructivist learning approach (Dağhan & Akkoyunlu, 2014). When using the constructivist approach (i.e., having a theoretical framework), there is no use for quantitative study (Yin, 2014). The results of research studies are strengthened with nontraditional data collection methods, such as an open-ended interview (Zhu et al., 2015). I utilized the open-ended interview method.

Mixed-methods research includes observational study, focus groups, and data gathered from numerical data and documents (Arris, Fitzsimmons, & Mawson, 2015). Quantitative data are not required for a researcher to assess strategies used to define an outcome (Hollingsworth et al., 2015). As such, conducting a mixed-methods study was not applicable to my research. The qualitative method was suitable for this study to determine and to obtain the lived experiences of the demographic under study.

### **Research Design**

A case study research design is the approach of analysis used for exploring a topic (Thomas, Suresh, & Suresh, 2013). A case study design allows a researcher to address four sets of research, (a) what questions to study, (b) what data are relevant, (c) what data to collect, and (d) how to analyze the results (Barclay & Stoltz, 2016; Landry, 2016). According to Thomas et al. (2013), researchers who use the case study design generate data that are admissible for research.

I considered both the phenomenological and ethnographic designs for this study. A researcher uses the phenomenological design to find out how people respond to a situation (Koopman, 2015). A phenomenologist's concern is the understanding of a group's behavior (Henry, Rivera, & Faithful, 2015). I was interested in the strategy

applied to garner a specific result not an understanding of a situation. Therefore a phenomenological design was not applicable to this type of research.

The ethnographic study is the long-term investigation of a group through immersion into their group (Marais, 2012). Ethnographic research was not appropriate due to the time constraints and my objective to find strategies used to increase productivity. A case study design allows researchers to understand the process when strategy applies, and obtain personal examples of experiences with strategy (Hollingsworth et al., 2015).

To ensure data saturation, I continued to collect participant responses until no new information emerged. Scholars employ the homogenous sampling technique to examine and analyze data collected from participants who meet the same criteria, who want to participate in the study until there is no more discovery information (Rowlands, Waddell, & McKenna, 2015). By selecting an appropriate population that can contribute to the research topic, a researcher can collect valuable data (Stivala, Koskinen, Rolls, Wang, & Robins, 2016).

### **Population and Sampling**

A researcher defines the population sample (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The population for the study was managers in the northeastern United States area chemical industry that consistently engage and motivate engaging employees in a chemical organization. The sample size was five participants. A small number of participants is appropriate for a qualitative study because a large sample size may not result in additional information (Robinson, 2014). Rapley (2014) posited a sample size of five is

appropriate for study because five to 15 participants can assure that the researcher meets data saturation (Stivala et al., 2016).

The sampling method for this study was homogenous. Homogenous sampling is essential for accurate data interpretation for an investigator to achieve data saturation (Yin, 2014). Homogenous sampling allows a researcher to select participants who can provide useful information and have knowledge of the topic (Johnson, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2014). In this study, a homogenous sampling method was appropriate to use for this research study to attain data saturation. The number of participants for a case study should reflect the depth of the topic to collect enough data (Yin, 2014). The number of participants consisted of five chemical business managers in the northeastern United States New Jersey area, who successfully engaged their employee in the chemical organization.

To ensure data saturation, I used hand-coding to identify the point when data saturation occurred and continued discussions until the saturation point was completed. Data saturation occurs when the participants no longer provide additional information, and no additional coding is needed (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Robinson, 2014). A researcher conducts continuous cycles of coding and analysis to determine when they achieve data saturation in a study (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

Face-to-face interviews were appropriate for this study because the qualitative inquiry was an investigation into the participants' experiences. When conducting face-to-face interviews, the identification of commonality may allow for my understanding of the



research data. A researcher engaged in systematic criteria to assure that qualitative inquiry excludes other factors, which could make the results invalid (Morse, 2014).

### **Ethical Research**

Per Bromley et al. (2015), the BR includes the basics of ethical research. During the informed consent process, a researcher adheres to the requirements of ethical research (Smith-Merry & Walton, 2014). Informed consent is a set of rules intended to respect the privacy of participants, and protect them from harm (Tam et al., 2015). The informed consent form for this study included details related to the purpose of the study, the nature of the study, the participant's rights, the researcher's contact information, and Walden University's contact information. Researchers standardly obtain written consent from participants. Respondent procedures for withdrawing from the study consist of them stating at any time that they do not wish to participate. In this study, there were no incentives for involved participants.

The consent form consists of an assurance of privacy for participants. I participated in the National Institutes of Health (NIH) program and am certified to act ethically and morally. A unique code was used for each participant to protect their confidentiality. Their data will be in a secure password enabled hard drive in my home for a maximum of 5 years. I identified the participants as interviewee 1, interviewee 2, and interviewee 3 (I1, I2, I3), etc., to assure there was no unintended release of personally identifiable information (PII) (Johnson, 2014). Confidentiality and security measures are to protect a participant from harm (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014; Connelly, 2014).

Protecting the names of individuals or organizations is to keep the participants and organizations confidential (Tansley, Kirk, & Fisher, 2014).

I interviewed participants after the Walden University Institution Review Board (IRB) approved this study. A summary of results and an electronic copy of the responses will be available for the participants. I will also share my results with the northeastern United States Small Business Association. The Walden IRB approval number for this study: 04-27-18-0516236, was presented to the participants.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

I was the primary instrument to collect data for this study. Data collection instruments are tools a researcher uses to gather information that applies to their topic and to understand the possible outcome of their research (Wilson, 2014). The selected primary data collection method for the study was semistructured interviews. Data collection for this study included interview information from participants, triangulated with company physical artifacts such as information gained through the company website, posters, bulletins, signage.

A researcher's skill and patience are paramount to adequately collecting data in qualitative research (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). Scholars who use semistructured interviews with open-ended questions have the benefit of asking follow-up questions to obtain additional responses (Wilson, 2014). I conducted my research using interview questions (see Section 1 & Appendix A).

I followed the procedures for the ethical protection of participants set forth by the BR regarding (a) boundaries between research and practice, (b) the primary ethical rules,

and (c) applications (Bromley et al., 2015). The rules of the Walden IRB are: (a) garnering consent, (b) recording the interview, (d) focusing on my participants, and (d) developing follow-up questions by listening to respondents during the interview.

To mitigate research bias, I recognized and diminished the existence of bias. A researcher must acknowledge their potential for bias as an instrument of research (Lewis, 2015). The goal is to hear and interpret the experiences and reflections of the participants about the phenomena. A technique used to assure research validity is member checking (Harper & Cole, 2012). To conduct member checking, the interpretation of the data was presented to respondents to verify the accuracy of what they wanted to say (Bevan, 2014; Nour, 2014).

Using data collection techniques for a study in alignment with the specific interview questions generated from literature review was to provide participant views and insights on the strategies utilized by chemical company managers to influence productivity in business. I used an electronic voice recorder device in conjunction with taking notes to ensure the collection of data is without error.

Methodological triangulation in a case study involves the use of multiple data sources for data analysis (Carter et al., 2014). To triangulate the data, I used the semistructured interview process to compare the data obtained during interviews. Second, I collected data from company physical artifacts such as website, posters, bulletins, and signage. Examination of the company website helped to gain information in answering the research question. Using triangulation consistently can increase the validity and reliability of the information obtained from the participants (Cleland, 2015).

Using instruments that are valid and reliable is an essential element of research quality (Anderson & Holloway-Libell, 2014). Reliability is the measure of the durability, internal consistency of measurement instruments, and the data collected (Makrakis & Kostoulas-Makrakis, 2016). I took notes of respondents' answers to the standardized interview questions to increase reliability and validity of this study. The interview protocol process is standardized to ensure the validity of the research process. Each participant answered the same interview questions (see Appendix A).

### **Data Collection Technique**

In this study, I used the semistructured interview data, company physical artifacts such as website, posters, bulletins, and signage to collect data. Yin (2014) described the semistructured interview as one of the required data collection techniques a researcher conducting a qualitative research study can utilize. Observation research involves the researcher taking descriptive notes of what is happening and usually takes place in natural settings (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Other data collection techniques in qualitative research are focus groups and action research. Focus groups work when it is better to use a group rather than individuals to obtain information, either due to time constraints or when a population is small (Silverman, 2016). Action research is when a researcher takes part in an activity and records the outcome (Silverman, 2016). For this study, I used the individual interview research and company physical artifacts, as according to Silverman (2016), they are the most appropriate to determine the strategies used by individuals.

I conducted semistructured, face-to-face interviews in alignment with the interview protocol. Based on suggestions from Silverman (2016), open-ended questioning took

place in a setting pre-arranged between myself and the participant. Interviews started by ensuring the participant signed the consent form, and that recording of the conversation is acceptable to the respondent.

Yin (2014) recommended a recording of interviews for transcription purposes. A pilot study was not required for this study because the study was not an experimental study (Dwarika-Bhagat, Sa, & Majumder, 2017; Foster & Gaughf, 2014; Foster & Gaughf, 2015; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Silverman (2016) wrote that the semistructured individual interview research technique assures that a researcher will secure information by

1. Asking open-ended questions about the topic the researcher wants information.
2. Asking broad questions to prompt the interviewee to offer rich, descriptive data.
3. Encouraging the interviewee if they are looking for more information or are intrigued by what the participant is saying.
4. Probing the interviewee to elaborate or follow a new line of inquiry based on what the interviewee said or is saying.

The following steps were used to collect data from participants:

- After obtaining IRB approval, potential participants were contacted via email and telephone. When potential participants agreed to participate, the informed consent form was sent to them via email.
- Upon receipt of the informed consent form, I contacted the participants to clarify

any questions and scheduled the date and time for the face-to-face interview.

- Before conducting the interviews, I sent the participant the interview questions via email along with a description of how I conducted the interviews.
- I emailed participants information about my study, the interview process, and confidentiality.
- I verified the respondents' consent, time commitment, and the rights of participants to answer some or none of the questions. I also informed the respondents of their right to withdraw from the study at any time and the storage process for securing confidential information.
- I informed the respondents that the data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home and destroyed after 5 years' post-study.
- The face-to-face interviews began with introductions and an overview of the topic.
- I informed the participants that I would record the interviews to ensure the accuracy of the data collected, but they must give their permission to record their responses.
- I informed them that the interview will last approximately 45 minutes and possibly have follow-up questions.
- I explained the concept of member checking, ensure each question is thoroughly explained and confirmed the answers provided are the information they want to convey in relation to the topic under study. The participants verified data provided by using member checking to ensure the accuracy of the collected

information.

- After confirming answers are satisfactory to the participants, I concluded the interview with a thank you for participating in the study.

### **Data Organization Technique**

To identify the emerging themes and organize data, I used an axial coding method to refine themes. Axial coding is a process of relating categories to their subcategories by hand. Axial (hand) coding allows a researcher to understand and interpret their work, participants' responses, and conduct their data analysis anywhere, at any time (Bearss et al., 2016).

After I interviewed the participants, the data were transcribed and formatted for coding in Microsoft Word. By color coding the data: *Green* (pending), *Light Blue* (irrelevant), and *Orange* (applicable to theory), the data coding process repeated until reaching data saturation. The levels of coding provided the reader's context for the underlying themes (Cleland, 2015). The raw data resulting from my coding technique will remain in my home in a locked file cabinet for a minimum of 5 years to protect participants.

### **Data Analysis**

In this research study, I used methodological triangulation to establish validity. When researchers, analyze and interpret a study it is essential to assure that the research is valid (Carter et al., 2014; Parker, 2014). This case study consisted of open-ended interview questions and company physical artifacts such as website, posters, bulletins, and signage. I asked open-ended interview questions, which supported the overarching

research question: What are the strategies that some business managers in the chemical industry use to engage employees and increase productivity?

All participants responded to six open-ended questions related to how chemical company managers engage employees and increase productivity. Parker (2014) suggested that researchers use open-ended questions to garner information when no predetermined answer category exists. Study participants give broad explanations when asked open-ended questions (Bone et al., 2017). I processed the data by doing the following: (a) conducting member checking to ensure the accuracy of the data; (b) completing Yin's (2014) five-step data analysis process for a case study to collect data, disassemble data, reassemble data, interpret data, and arrange the data; and (c) ensuring an ongoing evaluation of potential biases. Researchers use a data analysis process to organize and analyze data in a way that may allow them access to deeper levels of inquiry (Bearss et al., 2016; Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014).

I entered the respondents' answers in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet by themes. When data is hand-coded, themes can emerge. I moved the respondents' answers to the themes for the organization, analysis, and storage of the data (Cleland, 2015). The prospective groupings of themes are CS for the case study and PT for practice and theory. By color coding the data: I used green to represent *pending* information, light blue to represent *irrelevant* information, and orange for information *applicable to the conceptual framework (theory)*, the data coding process was replicated using color until the researcher achieves saturation.



I established themes of the respondents' answers using the associated member checking description in the ethical research section. Themes obtained from the data collection associated with the overall research question may include (a) management support, (b) productivity, (c) reward and recognition, and (d) employee development and extended care. As theming is proven to reduce confusion, the topic under study must be something in current events. Otherwise, researchers risk losing information (Landrum & Garza, 2015).

### **Reliability and Validity**

To ensure reliability and validity, transparency in processes and compliance with IRB regulations contribute to the reliability of any data collected by the researcher. The effect reliability and validity have on qualitative research are minimized by keeping vigilant to the protocols set forth by others in respect for the research method. The reliability of the study increases when a researcher conducts a skillful review and uses data collection techniques, which allow them to garner the most information (Cleland, 2015).

#### **Reliability**

According to Cleland (2015), qualitative researchers can establish the reliability of the study through dependability. Through member checking of data, I addressed dependability. Di Fabio (2016) wrote that when a study is replicable, it is dependable. By member checking, participants can add to or take away from their responses for the readers' understanding (Rowlands et al., 2015). The dependability concept is when the researcher also asks whether one would obtain the same results if they conduct the same

study twice or more. Dependability in qualitative research is impossible because the same thing cannot be measured twice with different participants (Di Fabio, 2016). Qualitative researchers cannot replicate dependability; member checking is the only way to ascertain dependable research findings.

### **Validity**

The validity is a determination of how well a researcher measures what is claimed to be measured (Yin, 2014). The two forms of validity in qualitative research are internal and external validity (Bearss et al., 2016). Internal validity is the extent of accuracy the results have in satisfying the overarching research questions. How a researcher can generalize the results of a study to a larger population is the external validity (Cleland, 2015).

**Credibility.** Through triangulation of the research results with archival data on the topic of study, I ensured credibility. In qualitative research, the results are valid when the participants of a study review the information. Respondents are the only people who can attest to the credibility of the results (Anderson, Toles, Corazzini, McDaniel, & Colón-Emeric, 2014).

**Transferability.** To ensure transferability, it is important to provide the descriptions document of the study process in detail to enable others to reproduce the study ((Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Rowlands et al., 2015). Transferability is an extent to which the findings of a study could be transferred to diverse contexts or settings (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The qualitative researcher can improve transferability by describing

the research setting correctly (Nour, 2014). I presented the results in a way that can be easily understood by anyone who reads the result of the study.

**Confirmability.** Confirmability is the level to which the findings may be corroborated by others (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Researchers establish confirmability when they document the procedures for checking the data throughout the study, and the diversity in the way that the data is understandable to others (Bears et al., 2016). As a researcher, I documented the measures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study to ensure confirmability. Data saturation occurred with a homogenous sampling technique. My research continued by asking for participants' responses until no new information emerges to satisfy the requirements for confirmability.

### **Transition and Summary**

In Section 2, I conducted a review of the research method and design, defined the reasons behind the selection to utilize a qualitative case study design to research how chemical managers use employee engagement to improve productivity. Also, the description of the role of the researcher, the participants, and the sampling technique are presented. Descriptions of the semistructured interview technique, ethical aspects, and lastly the reliability and validity of the study, are existent in Section 2. Section 3 consists of presentation of the study's findings from the participants' responses, discussion of the application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for further research, reflections, and conclusion.

### Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Social Change

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies that some business managers in the chemical industry use to engage employees and increase productivity. To achieve the purpose of the study, I used data from small chemical business manager's interviews, and company artifacts such as their website, posters, bulletins, and signage. From the participants' answers to the interview questions and a review of pertinent documentation and physical artifacts, I identified three themes: (a) leadership support, (b) effective communication, and (c) recognition and reward. The conceptual framework used for the study was SET. I applied Microsoft tools to analyzed study data, centralized data systematically. Also, I used Microsoft tools for inputting data traceability matrix, analyzing data and, coding data, and member checking. Section 3 includes findings from the participants' responses, the potential implications for social change, recommendations, reflections, and conclusion.

#### **Presentation of the Findings**

In this qualitative single case study, I intended to answer the overarching research question: What are the strategies that some business managers in the chemical industry use to engage employees and increase productivity? To answer the central research question, I conducted face-to-face interviews with five chemical business managers in a small chemical industry company located in the northeastern United States. The three themes that appeared from the data were: (a) leadership support, (b) effective communication, and (c) recognition and reward.

I used a five-step process of collecting data and analyzing data indicated by Yin (2014), which consists of: (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting, and (e) concluding. The five participants answered the same six questions, and I compiled a verbatim transcript of each participant's response, completed member checking to ensure validity, and ensured data saturation. I imported all data into Microsoft Excel. I rearranged the data based on the similar content of the information each participant provided and interpreted creating the three main themes, which answered the research questions and strategies small business managers could use to engage employees that could lead to employee involvement and increase productivity.

### **Theme 1: Leadership Support**

All five participants (100%) emphasized the importance of leadership support in engaging employees in the workplace. Three of five participants (60%) stated that leadership support is essential in engaging employees. Participant I1 indicated that the key to success of employee engagement is to get employees involved in solving problems, which makes an employee feel valued as contributing to the success of the company. Leadership support leads to employee involvement (Lysova et al., 2015). The findings from this study aligned with literature suggesting that management supports influence employees to achieve a corporate goal (Schwarz, 2017; Top et al., 2014).

Setting a baseline expectation for all employees, and giving employees an opportunity to discuss feedback and problems, make an employee feel engaged and inspires them to go above and beyond expectation (I4). I3 stated that by asking employees for suggestions and implementing those suggestions in the business area,

employees became engaged and energized when they realize that their ideas are valued. Conversely, I5 shared “that individual can get discouraged when recommendations are not implemented as expected despite feedback from management on why those recommendations are not being implemented.” Consequently, employees have become disillusioned and disengaged. They are unwilling to commit emotionally and intellectually to new ideas because they have been “let down” so often in the past. According to I5 “This is the most difficult challenge facing any manager in our current environment.” I3 added that the best way to start that process is to begin an active give-and-take discussion about the future direction of the business unit, then putting some of those ideas into action. According to I1 “For example, perhaps a group of office employees has issues with carpal tunnel syndrome. A good business manager can form an employee task force to tackle the problem and suggest potential solutions or perhaps a pilot program to test a variety of solutions”. Popli and Rizvi (2015) stated that effective managers achieve goals by involving their employees in the process. According to I5 “By providing resources and support to the team, the entire group becomes thrilled and actively engaged in resolving the problem”. Managers recognize the value that comes clear expectations, which leads to increase in employee engagement (Bacha, 2014).

The conceptual framework for this study supported the idea of leadership support to influence employee engagement. Based on the concept of SET, management support motivates employees in achieving a common organizational goal. In an examination of the participants’ company’s website, I identified statements such as “highly engaged

colleagues is essential to our culture through leadership involvement” and “inclusion of management diversity to promote learning, advancement, and engagement.”

### **Theme 2: Effective communication**

All the participants stated that effective communication increases employee development. I3 shared “communication plays a crucial role in the development of employees”. I2 stated “the implementation of employee safety/quality/productivity training that develops an employee’s sense of impact on the operations of the plant is essential”. Effective communication is one of the factors influencing employee engagement in the workplace (Jaupi & Llaci, 2015). Leader communication strategies are critical to improving employee engagement (Oppenheimer & Konje, 2015). Effective communication theme aligned with SET, which is one of the conceptual framework determinant factors for employee engagement.

All participants (100%) stated that implementing an admired communication approach could lead to and engaging employees. Effective communication in the workplace enhances the employee’s connection to organizational goals, values, and opportunity (Men & Stacks, 2014). I4, I3, and I5 stated that “managers should be able to convey information to the employees in such a way they can provide feedback or criticism to employees without causing disengagement”. The findings from this study echoed literature; effective communications help to establish clear expectations for employees (Bacha, 2014; Georgiades, 2015a). For employees, clear expectations will convey how their performance will impact the company, which give the employee an indication of involvement in achieving organizational goals (Basbous & Malkawi, 2017).

Managers who followed the employee-development, communication processes by effectively coaches, mentors, and counselors will engage employee and improve employee performances (Albrecht et al., 2015). Communication is one of the conceptual framework determinant factors for employee engagement. The effective communication theme aligned with SET, as communication creates trust, and good relations between workers and leaders in achieving common goals (Basbous & Malkawi, 2017). The information obtained from the participants' company's website and physical artifacts verified this theme: "communication enhances the employee's connection to organizational goals, values, opportunity and build a social forum."

### **Theme 3: Recognition and reward**

All the participants agreed that managers should create a work environment in which people feel important and appreciated. Reward systems are tools to motivate employees and to achieve better results (Cropanzano et al., 2016). I3 shared: "I believe in employee recognition as employees respond to appreciation expressed through recognition of their good work". Furthermore, I1 added "rewards confirms that others are valuing employee work". I1 and I5 stated "when employee work is appreciated, they are motivated to maintain or improve their good work, which will increase job satisfaction and productivity rises accordingly". Employees respond to incentives and appreciation communicated through recognition of their excellent work (Hlanganipai & Mazanai, 2014). The theme solidified the findings from the literature: employees are mostly engaged in the workplace when receiving regular incentives and constructive feedback on



performance and understand the link to the business improve performance (Albdour & Altarawneh, 2014; Kim, 2014).

During the interview, all of the respondents mentioned the importance of recognition and reward for good performance as a way to motivate and engaged employee. Two participants' (40%), employees feel valued by being recognized and rewarded for good performance. I4 and I5, "when employee's effort is appreciated productivity will increase, and they are motivated to maintain or improve performance". Performance recognition is critical in employee engagement (Abdullah, 2014). This theme reverberates SET of exchange responsibility as the rewards or benefits creates positive value and a sense of recognition to employees (Rana, 2015), which could lead to employee engagement and increase productivity. The triangulation of the interview data and information from the participant's company websites such as employee involvement survey results (EIS) revealed that 85% of employees are in favor of recognition for performance and reward for performance improve involvement."

### **Application to Professional Practice**

The findings from this study supported the idea of Homans' (1958) SET, and consisted of different determinant factors that influence employee engagement, which include: (a) management support, (b) employee communication, (c) rewards and recognition, and (d) employee development and extended care. The results of this study validate reasons for business managers to promote strategies to engage employees and increase productivity. The strategy could strengthen business relationships to improve employee engagement and productivity within the organization. Findings from this study

added to the previous and the existing body of knowledge about the employee engagement.

Theme 1 revealed leadership support is essential to increase productivity in the workplace. Previous studies conducted by Biswas et al. (2013) suggested that management support gives employees more reason to engage in the workplace. SET suggests that relationships develop over time into trust, through leadership support, which could lead to engagement. Employees respect managers that provide their support with the transparency of the organizational goals align with their professional objectives (Kim, 2014). The small business manager could implement this strategy based on the findings of the participant's responses, current and previous literature to create an environment that makes employees feel valued in invested in the organization.

Theme 2 revealed effective communication could assist small business managers in engaging employees and increasing productivity. Effective communication and adequate coaching from management are one of the primary strategies for increasing employee engagement (Mishra et al., 2014; Oswick, 2015). SET confirms the effective communication is one of the strategies small business managers could implement to improve employee engagement as the findings discovered from the participants' responses aligned with current and previous literature.

Theme 3 revealed recognition and reward are critical in engaging employees. Previous researchers using SET noted that an employer must embrace compensation programs to influence employee performance (Anitha, 2014; Brown, 2014). Homans's (1958) theory supported the idea of benefits exchanged between employees and

employers to increase employee performance. Small business managers could benefit from implementing recognition and reward programs to promote employee engagement and increase productivity in the workplace. Additionally, implementing findings from this study may contribute to social change.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The findings of this study could be used to improve employee engagement in the chemical industry and any organization, and also contribute to social change. The participants consisted of small business managers in the chemical industry who created and implemented strategies to improve employee engagement and productivity in the workplace. Managers in any organization could include strategies identified in this study to enhance employee engagement. Employees are the most important asset of any organization (Zhang et al., 2014). Engaged employees are likely to bring a positive attitude to the workplace and increase organizational productivity (Homans, 1958).

The results of this study may fill the knowledge gap of what strategies small business managers should implement to engage and improve employee productivity. Managers need to provide support to employees with resources and benefits to reciprocate higher levels of engagement (Neuhofer et al., 2016). Thus, managers can use strategies from this study to influence employee engagement in the workplace, which could lead to improved organizational performance, sustainability, and positively affect employees' families and communities.

Managers that understand the importance of employee engagement create a healthy working environment that reflects on the social impact created by the

organization (Breevaart et al., 2015). Engaged employees earn a steady income to support the family, contribute to the local community, and show a commitment to social responsibility. Employee engagement could also result in a lower employee turnover rate, an increase in employee job satisfaction, and higher productivity.

### **Recommendations for Action**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies that some business managers in the chemical industry use to engage employees and increase productivity. Based on the findings of the study, I recommend actions that current and future chemical business managers could consider when employing strategies to engage the employee and increase productivity. The small business manager needs to understand three main themes of the study for engaging employee successfully: (a) leadership support, (b) effective communication, and (c) reward and recognition.

The first recommendation for small business managers in the chemical industry is to provide leadership support to their workforces by developing a partnership and involve the workforce in the decision-making process to make the employee feel valued and contributing to the success of the company. Supportive leaders tend to engage the employee in the workplace (Men & Stacks, 2014). The second recommendation is to provide clear communication and feedback by well-defined expectations, coaching, and training to create a successful working environment that could influence employee engagement. Good communication can boost morale, enhance processes, engagement, productivity, and reduce employee turnover (Karanges et al., 2015). The third recommendation for the small business managers is to develop a robust compensation,

rewards, and recognition program to promote engagement and productivity. Brown (2014) indicated that compensation and reward programs could include: (a) merit raises, (b) bonuses, (c) spot award rewards, (d) tuition reimbursement, (e) training, and (f) benefits (i.e., gift cards and stock options).

A business manager in any industry who is seeking strategies to improve employee engagement should consider the findings of this study. Future researchers, such as students, may find the results of this study useful. The results of the study will be distributed through Walden University for scholarly works academic purposes. I intend to publish the study in the business forums where business managers discuss strategies for employee engagement to benefit managers in various industries.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

I conducted a qualitative single case study to explore the strategies that some business managers in the chemical industry use to engage employees and increase productivity. The population for the study consisted of five chemical business managers of a small chemical company in the northeastern United States area. The company selected was one of the limitations of this study as the company chosen may not be representative of the similar companies in the industry. The study was also limited to one geographic location.

Future researchers should consider conducting a study of employee engagement in a different operational industry. Moreover, a different methodology, such as quantitative or mixed methods, should be used as well as conducting future research in a different location or in a different industry, such as construction. Finally, findings of this

study can assist managers in engaging employees. Although engaging employees in any organization can be challenging, leaders need to understand what motivates employees to improve productivity and to sustain an organization.

### **Reflections**

Attaining a doctoral degree is intense in all aspects, it is time-consuming, and it involves a substantial financial investment. The feedback waiting period makes the process longer. However, all the sacrifices are worth getting the degree, and I thank God I achieved a long-term dream. I am grateful for my chair and the committee members that contributed to my success. In conducting the research, I gained experience, which increased my knowledge significantly and validated my profession as an operational leader involved in dealing with employees in both the union and the non-union business environment. I learned scholarly writing skills and had the opportunity to meet with magnificent managers that successfully engage employees.

My perspective of employee engagement includes leadership support by providing necessary tools for employees. The developed robust training program, including coaching, mentoring employees, involving employees in decision making, and providing an opportunity for work-life balance could influence engagement in the workplace. The findings from this aligned with my thoughts about employee engagement. However, I ensured that my concerns about employee engagement did not create bias with the use of member checking. The findings of the study suggested some strategies small business managers could use to improve employee engagement and increase productivity.

## Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies that some business managers in the chemical industry use to engage employees and increase productivity. Participants' responses to the interview questions, a review of pertinent documentation, and physical artifacts such as company's website, posters, bulletins, and signage provided an understanding of employee engagement in the workplace. Business managers' strategies to engage employees and improve productivity in the workplace should include themes in this study. The three themes that emerged from this study include (a) leadership support, (b) effective communication, and (c) recognition and reward. Better engagement results in better productivity (Mishra et al., 2014). The conceptual framework for the research study was SET. The findings from the study suggested business managers who implement the strategies may see an improvement in employee engagement, which could increase productivity. A manager whose employees are engaged will perform better than the manager whose employees are less engaged (Herminingsih, 2017). Thus, engaged employees at work feel a connection with the company and value added to the organization goals.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

The central research question for the study is the following: What are the strategies that some business managers in the chemical industry use to engage employees and increase productivity?

1. What strategies do you use to engage employees and increase productivity in your organization?
2. What strategies do you believe have increased productivity?
3. What strategies of those you mentioned would you implore again?
4. What engagement challenges do you encounter in your organization?
5. How do you measure employee engagement to improve performance?
6. What additional comments you would like to share regarding employee engagement?

## Appendix B: Site Permission Letter

## Appendix C: Site Permission Letter

Date 04/27/18

TO: [REDACTED]

Address: [REDACTED]

RE: Permission to Conduct Research Interviews at Site

Dear [REDACTED]

I am writing to request permission to conduct research study interviews in your company at XXXconference room. I enrolled in the Doctor of Business Administration program at Walden University, in Minneapolis, Minnesota and am in the process of writing my doctoral study. The study is entitled exploring the strategies business manager use to engage employees in a chemical organization. I hope the organization will allow me to interview 5 members of [REDACTED] who has successfully engaged employees to participate in an interview. Interested business managers who volunteer to participate, will sign a consent form, and return the form to the primary researcher at the beginning of the interviewing process.

If approved, business managers will participate in the interviews in the conference room at your site. The interviewing process will be 30 minutes to 1 hour. The interview results for the doctoral study and individuals of this study will remain confidential. I would follow-up by email and would be happy to answer any questions or concerns that you may have at that time. You may contact me at [akeemadeyemi@walden.com](mailto:akeemadeyemi@walden.com).

If you agree, kindly sign below and return the signed form in the enclosed self-addressed envelope. Alternatively, kindly submit a signed letter of permission on your institution's letterhead acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct this study at your institution.



Sincerely,

Akeem Adeyemi

A large, dark, irregular redaction mark covering the signature area.

Permission to proceed

### Appendix C: Invitation to Participate in the Study

My name is Akeem Adeyemi. As part of my doctoral study research at Walden University, I would like to invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting. The purpose of the study is to explore the strategies business manager use to engage employees in a chemical organization. I contacted you to participate because you are a manager in a chemical organization leading workforce. Participation in the research study is voluntary and is confidential. Please read the enclosed consent form carefully and ask any questions that you may have before acting on the invitation to participate. To achieve the objectives of the research study, your participation depends on satisfying criteria for this study, which include: (a) experienced managers who work for a chemical company, (b) a minimum of 2 years of experience in a managerial role leading workforce, and (c) managers who oversee a minimum of three employees. If you meet these criteria and would like to participate in this study, please contact me at (xxx) xxx-xxx or e-mail to schedule a convenient time for an interview. I anticipate that the total time required for each interview will not be more than one hour. The interviews will be audio recorded, and participants will have the opportunity to review the transcribed interview for accuracy before inclusion in the study. I sincerely appreciate your valuable time and thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Akeem Adeyemi