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Strategies to Generate Employee Engagement

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Diane M. Marshall

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2018

Abstract

Strategies to Generate Employee Engagement

by

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MS, American Intercontinental University, 2012

BS, American Intercontinental University, 2013

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

October 2018

Abstract

When leaders use an ineffective communication strategy, it leads to decreased employee engagement, and thus increases the potential for lost productivity and profitability. The purpose of this case study was to explore effective communication strategies managers used to improve employee engagement and increase productivity as well as profitability. The motivating language theory served as the conceptual framework for this study. A semistructured interview technique was used to interview 3 purposefully selected managers in the northeastern region of the United States about the successful strategies they generated to improve employee engagement. Two themes emerged from data analysis: creating a culture that generates employee engagement, and effective internal communication to improve employee engagement. The findings of this study may contribute to positive social change by providing business leaders strategies for improving employee engagement. Engaged employees may offer their time and skills to serve the community through volunteer service and events to solve social issues associated with the environment, education, health, and community enhancement.

Building Successful Strategies to Generate Employee Engagement

by

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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October 2018

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. My mother, Laura Marshall, worked hard and effortlessly in providing me a good life. She raised me to know I am somebody with goals and dreams and encouraged me to always stay true to who I am. She taught me love, respect, honesty, and—most of all—how to become a strong woman. She taught me how to raise my family with love and respect, and to keep God first in all my endeavors. In addition, I dedicate this dissertation to my brother Gregory Marshall, who I love. He has stood beside me in the good times and the bad; he did not judge me, he loved me.

To my children, Chaqueta, Joseph, Devin, and Daniel, I love you. Thanks for understanding what I needed to accomplish will make you stronger, teach you to never give up, and prove it is never too late to pursue your dreams. To my grandchildren, Troy, Devere, Morshay, and Noah, I love you. In whatever you do, do it well and endure it to the end. To a very special friend that kept me focused when I wanted to give up, I love you and thank you for being a positive part of my life.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Employee engagement strategies are imperative in an environment of constant change (Mehta & Mehta, 2013). Across business sectors, managers are researching strategies to analyze employees' views, feelings, and what motivates their commitment and engagement in their positions and the business (Vidyarthi, Erdogan, Anand, Liden, & Chaudhry, 2017). Engaged employees demonstrate an awareness of the business mission and devote extra time and effort to accomplish business goals (Matthews, Mills, Trout, & English, 2014). The manager's role in employee engagement is important. Competitive advantage occurs in businesses when leaders efficiently and effectively improve their employee engagement strategy. A company's focus on internal communication strategies can lead to improvement in the employee engagement and motivation to enhance productivity and profitability (Taneja, Sewell, & Odom, 2015).

Background of the Problem

Researchers in management and communication areas have documented the important contributions of engaged employees (Men & Hung-Baesecke, 2015). Leaders and managers in various businesses have found employee engagement to be important in shaping the efficiency and effectiveness of the business (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014). These researchers have focused on outward communication such as advertising and public relations and have paid less attention to the benefits of strategic internal communication in businesses (Stegaroiu & Talal, 2014). Internal communication is vital; when leaders emphasize the importance of internal communication, they can build a motivated workforce. Business leaders who use communication strategies as a means of

enhancing the manager-employee relationship benefit the rewards of increased productivity and profitability (Stegaroiu & Talal, 2014).

Employee engagement refers to employees' commitment to their work and the company. Everyone involved in business benefits from employee engagement, which leads to a knowledgeable and productive environment (Ruck, Welch, & Menara, 2017). Engagement begins with business leaders demonstrating a strong commitment to the inclusion of employees as part of the organization's strategic plan (Taneja et al., 2015). According to Taneja et al., this encompasses open communication and the introduction of ideas from employees on the business's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT). Business leaders should view employee engagement as a long-term commitment between managers, leaders, employees, and the business (Taneja et al., 2015). Managers who create an environment of effective communication and trust increase competitive favor in the marketplace; however, some company managers are not aware of the strategies needed to develop an environment of employee engagement.

Problem Statement

Disengaged employees account for more than \$300 billion in lost productivity annually (Saratun, 2016). Only 13% of employees worldwide are reported to be engaged with the managers in their businesses (Al Mehrzi & Singh, 2016). Sniderman, Fenton-O'Creevy, and Searle (2016) stated the managers' inability to effectively communicate with the employee can have a negative effect on business and society. In my study, the general business problem was that disengaged employees negatively affected manager-employee relationships, which causes a loss of productivity. The specific business

problem was that some managers lack the effective communication strategies needed to improve employee engagement and increase productivity as well as profitability.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to explore the effective communication strategies that managers used to improve employee engagement and increase productivity as well as profitability. The target population comprised three managers operating in companies located in the northeastern region of the United States who have developed and implemented communication strategies to improve employee engagement and increase productivity as well as profitability. This study's implications for social impact include increasing sustainable engagement to increase productivity that bridges the engagement gap between managers and employees. When employees are engaged, business leaders can more effectively allocate their resources and invest in the community by providing employment opportunities to sustain, grow, and increase profitability.

Nature of the Study

I used the qualitative method and chose a descriptive case study design for this investigation. According to Ruzzene (2014), a qualitative descriptive case study is a purposeful form of analysis in the social sciences. Qualitative researchers seek to understand the *what*, *how*, or *why* of a phenomenon (Gehman et al., 2017). According to Yates and Leggett (2016), using qualitative research allows the researcher to become mindful of the socially formed nature of the phenomenon through the participant's views. Stoudt (2014) indicated that researchers use quantitative research to examine

relationships and trends using numerical data to uncover the research phenomenon. I did not choose the quantitative method because there was not a need to examine relationships or trends to address my specific business problem. Researchers who use the mixed-method approach incorporate quantitative and qualitative methods to examine and explore variables (Whiteman, 2015). I did not need to examine differences among variables to address my specific business problem; therefore, the mixed-method approach was not appropriate for this study.

I considered ethnography, narrative theory, and phenomenology for this study, but determined these designs would not be appropriate. Ethnography involves the discovery and description of a cultural group (Knobloch et al., 2017). Dailey and Browning (2014) reported that using a narrative design enables researchers to identify and explore human actions through stories. Phenomenology involves exploring the meaning that individuals attribute to their experience of phenomenon (Gorichanaz & Latham, 2016). I chose a descriptive case study design for this research. According to Koenitz, Ferri, Haahr, Sezen, and Sezen (2015), researchers use a case study design to conduct in-depth interviews to gather information from the participants, which could lead to an understanding of the phenomenon in its real-world context.

Research Question

I developed the following research question to guide this study: What communication strategies do managers use to improve employee engagement to increase productivity and profitability?

Interview Questions

1. What organization issues demonstrated the need to improve employee engagement in your organization?
2. What communication strategies did you develop and implement to improve employee engagement to avoid the loss of productivity and profitability?
3. What challenges have you encountered when attempting to improve employee engagement? How did you address the challenges to avoid the loss of productivity and profitability?
4. How did you communicate the implementation of the employee engagement strategies and plans to your employees?
5. How have you determined the effectiveness of your strategies for improving employee engagement to determine if your strategies are successful?
6. What additional information about implementing effective communication strategies, improving employee engagement, and increasing productivity and profitability would you like to share?

Conceptual Framework

The motivating language theory (MLT) served as the conceptual framework for this study. Sullivan (1988) researched MLT and revealed the spoken language of leadership has a critical effect on worker motivation. Researchers can use MLT as a strong foundational framework to begin exploring communication strategies to improve employee engagement and increase productivity as well as profitability (Sarros, Luca, Densten, & Santora, 2014). Sullivan (1998) theorized that motivating language has the

goal of connecting leader initiatives and employee understanding to positively impact employee engagement (Holmes & Parker, 2017). Sullivan's MLT emerged from the speech act theory in linguistics and its three categories of utterances developed by Searle (1969). Searle attempted to explain how individuals use speech to accomplish actions, as well as how receivers of speech create meaning from what they hear (Misic Ilic & Radulovic, 2015). Organizational leaders can use MLT to focus on effective communication between managers and employees.

Managers who use the MLT use the categories of utterances from speech act theory to understand how effective and ineffective communication can affect employees' motivation (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2016). Speech act theory consists of three basic categories. The first is direction giving (perlocutionary), which reflects a leader's speech application, objectives, and initiatives. The second category is empathetic (illocutionary), wherein a manager is willing to share emotion with an employee and develop a sense of trust and self-worth, thereby creating a bond between manager and employee. The final category is meaning-making (locutionary), which occurs when a manager's communication to an employee explains the mission and ethics of the organization (Farida & Ganiem, 2017). Mayfield and Mayfield (2012) suggested that managers who use MLT combined with the three categories of utterances can promote a more efficient workforce, which can have a positive effect on employees' engagement and on the business's productivity and profitability.

Operational Definitions

Cognitive engagement: How employees view work as meaningful and whether the employee has the appropriate tools to complete the work (Shuck & Reio, 2014).

Communication strategies: The methods of communication that reveal internal communication as the first frontier in an organization. Communication strategies founded on strong corporate values can be suitable for transforming unmotivated employees into those who are engaged in adding value to an organization and fulfilling organizational goals (Stegaroiu & Talal, 2014).

Disengagement: An employee's withdrawal of physical, cognitive, and emotional attachment from work roles to protect oneself from a threat (Kahn, 1990).

Employee engagement: The emotional, behavioral, and cognitive state of an individual employee while at work (Shuck & Herd, 2012).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are facts or events that are not verifiable or testable and may be out of a researcher's control (Jansson, 2013). My first assumption in this study was that some managers who operate a business in northeastern region of the United States have generated strategies to improve employee engagement. Second, because there was no validation of the criteria needed to participate in the study, I assumed the participants would represent themselves as experienced managers who have used successful strategies to improve employee engagement.

Limitations

Simon (2011) stated that limitations in qualitative research identify potential weaknesses that may threaten the credibility of the study. This study involved several inherent limitations. First, there are many businesses located in the northeastern region of the United States, and only a small population participated in this study. Second, because the study participants represented only a fraction of the businesses located in the northeastern region of the United States, the information received from the interviews did not apply to all businesses.

Delimitations

Qualitative study delimitations are those factors used to restrict the scope of the research (Simon, 2011; Yin, 2015). The population targeted for this study were managers employed in businesses operating in the northeastern region of the United States. Yin (2015) referred to delimitations in research as the study boundaries. The study boundaries consisted of literature on communication, employee engagement, and motivation to understand what successful strategies managers have generated to improve employee engagement while increasing productivity as well as profitability. The study included a small sample size, which could be helpful to leaders of other businesses located in the northeastern region of the United States who seek to implement strategies to improve employee engagement.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

Management communication and its effect on employee engagement may add value to businesses by providing knowledge for organizational managers seeking to develop creative strategies to increase productivity and profitability. Business leaders may gain valuable insight regarding the impact of effective and ineffective communication behaviors on employee engagement. Business leaders may learn valuable business lessons when they gain an understanding of how managerial communication affects employee engagement. In addition, the findings of this study may add value to businesses because using successful communication strategies could increase morale, productivity, profitability, and competitiveness in the organization. Taneja et al. (2015) suggested that effective communication strategies can lead to improved engagement, increased productivity and profitability, decrease turnover risk, and provide the opportunity to engage top talent, which can lead to higher returns.

Implications for Social Change

Social change can depend on business leaders' perceptions of how managerial communication strategies affect employee engagement and organizational productivity and profitability (Shuck & Herd, 2012). The results of this study may provide leaders with the solutions and best practices needed to mitigate the effects of ineffective communication and employee disengagement in the northeastern region of the United States businesses. Employee disengagement can adversely affect business and society by potentially limiting goods and services because of a decrease in productivity and

profitability. Engaged employees may offer their time and skills to serve the community through volunteer service and events to solve social issues associated with the environment, education, health, and community development.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The objective of this qualitative descriptive case study was to identify strategies managers used to improve employee engagement and increase productivity as well as profitability. This in-depth review includes a synthesis of literature on employee engagement, manager-employee relationships, trust, and communication. Literature reviews are essential in aggregating and disseminating knowledge in the management discipline (Kache & Seuring, 2014).

To find appropriate literature for this review, I searched academic databases for key terms and phrases associated with managers' strategies to improve employee engagement. Specifically, I used Walden University's library to access: EBSCO, Academic Search Premier, Business Source Premier, various science and psychology databases, Emerald Management Journals, ProQuest Central, ABI/INFORM Complete, Dissertations and Theses Full Text, and SAGE Premier. I also retrieved information regarding employee engagement from Questia Premier Online Research and Paper Writing Resource, and Google Scholar. These databases were helpful in obtaining literature on motivating theories, leader-employee theories, and strategies to generate employee engagement.

The 318 references I used in this study included 281 peer-reviewed scholarly articles (representing 88.4% of the total), eight non-peer reviewed articles (representing

2.5% of the total) and four books (representing 1.3% of the total). The following literature review includes 200 references; 173 (86.5%) of these were published between 2014 and 2018, the 5 years prior to my planned completion of this study.

I arranged this literature review by themes associated with strategies to improve employee engagement. The **conceptual framework** for this study was the MLT. In this literature review, I discuss articles and findings relevant to factors that could improve employee engagement and increase productivity as well as profitability. My study involved an in-depth investigation to explore the strategies managers can use to improve employee engagement. The information I retrieved from scholarly and peer-reviewed articles can aid in the development of strategies to improve employee engagement and increase productivity and profitability. The organization of the literature review includes an overview of (a) MLT and other underlying theories that apply, (b) theories regarding the leader-employee relationship, (c) employee engagement, and (d) leadership.

Motivating Language Theory

I chose Sullivan's (1988) MLT as the conceptual framework for this study. MLT focuses on leadership in the context of communication. Sullivan's particular focus is on employees' state of mind and the external forces that affect their level of engagement. Researchers in the communications field have developed communication models to assist in closing the gap between leaders and employees using verbal communication to motivate employees (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2016). Searle's speech act theory, which serves as the basis of MLT, involves classifying and transposing leader speech into motivational messages (Sullivan, 1988). Sullivan's MLT can aid in explaining the nature

of satisfaction in an organization by concentrating on communications between managers and workers. Sullivan noted that strategic leader speech has a positive impact on employees, which results in positive behavioral outcomes through engaging the three distinguishing speech acts.

Empathetic (illocutionary), direction giving (perlocutionary), and meaning-making (locutionary) are the three speech acts that Sullivan conceptualized (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2016). A manager uses empathetic speech to validate an employee for a well-done task. Direction-giving language occurs when leaders communicate effectively to assist in achieving the organization's goals. Meaning-making language happens when leaders share structural and ethical interpretations with the employees (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2016).

According to Searle (1969), all functions of language must be collaborative and have a connective impact on employee motivation. In contrast, Austin (1975) suggested that only supportive illocutionary communications from managers require the use of language in a restrictive manner to motivate workers. According to MLT, however, using all three functions of Searle's speech act can have a more positive influence on work behavior than using one function alone. Researchers have used MLT to explain employees' fulfillment in an organization by concentrating on communication between managers and workers (Sullivan, 1988). Leaders exerting the presuppositions of MLT provide direction, increase employee knowledge, and reduce uncertainty (Majovski, 2007). According to Sullivan (1988), when using MLT, leaders define the organizational

mission and values, which provides meaning to employees' work and contributes to the organization.

Theories of Motivation

McClelland's theory of achievement motivation. According to McClelland (1965), the theory of achievement motivation corresponds with the desire individuals have to achieve high performance goals. McClelland held that the satisfaction of personal needs is a result of an individual's ethnicity and culture. In regard to workplace needs, McClelland indicated that individuals need to sense affiliation, accomplishments, and empowerment from their managers; however, managers gravitate toward achievement motivation rather than affiliation motivation (McClelland & Boyatzis, 1982).

McClelland's research roughly coincided with Herzberg's (1967) needs theory, and both include an assumption that higher-level needs are most important at work (Jager, Born, & Vander Molen, 2017). McClelland conducted tests to measure what affirmations managers need to use to engage employees in their work. When measuring the achievement motive, McClelland found that highly motivated and task-oriented managers prefer timely criticism and feedback about their performance (Tricomi & DePasque, 2016). Power motive managers are those who need to provide their opinions, influence others, make suggestions, and have a low need for warm, supportive relationships (Stoeckart, Strick, Bijleveld, & Aarts, 2017). The power motive managers can become dictatorial, which can cause a gap in the manager-employee relationship and negatively affect an employee engagement initiative. Those managers with a need for

affiliation maintain professional and personal relationships with their employees (Steinmann, Ötting, & Maier, 2016). Managers need to concentrate on both sets of characteristics to improve employee engagement to increase productivity and profitability (Bhatti, Aslam, Hassan, & Sulaiman, 2016).

Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation. Using the content theory of motivation, Herzberg (1967) identified hygiene factors and motivators. Managers use hygiene factors and motivators to avoid unpleasantness and unfair treatment at work. The focus of Herzberg's two-factor theory is meeting workers' needs. Researchers have revealed that the hygiene and motivating factors correlating to job satisfaction are achievement, recognition, responsibility, and growth (Hsiao, Ma, & Auld, 2017; Matei & Abrudan, 2016). These factors have a significant role in improving employee engagement. According to Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (1967), company policy, administration, management, salary, interpersonal relationship with supervisors, and work conditions contribute to employee dissatisfaction, which causes disengagement.

Herzberg concluded what people do and the way others use and resource people contributes to their happiness, whereas unhappiness stems from unethical treatment (Amzat, Al-Mahruqi, Teslikhan, & Al Omairi, 2017). The absence of hygiene factors does not increase job satisfaction but rather decreases work performance. Herzberg's motivation and hygiene factors serve different purposes; however, managers should use both in the workplace to increase workers' satisfaction and productivity. Hygiene factors also explain how motivating factors can improve job satisfaction and encourage

employees to engage. Nevertheless, a lack of hygiene factors may contribute to low performance and productivity among employees (Amzat et al., 2017).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow (1943) established the five-level hierarchy of needs model. These levels include (a) physiological or basic needs, (b) safety needs, (c) love needs, (d) esteem needs, and (e) self-actualization needs (Maslow, 1943). In Maslow's theory of motivation, a manager can address each level to assist in improving employee motivation (Rahman & Nurullah, 2014).

Physiological needs refer to those needs people do not need to learn, such as hunger, thirst, and sleep (Maslow, 1943); however, after a person satisfies these needs, he or she is no longer motivated. Safety needs include security and the need for predictability and orderliness. Esteem needs include individuals' higher needs for self-esteem and the esteem of others. Self-actualization refers to the realization of an individual's potential. Only unsatisfied needs motivate individuals; hence, managers must direct attention to the needs that remain unsatisfied to provide individual motivation (Jonas, 2016).

Law (2016) discussed motivation in the workforce. Drawing on Maslow's (1943) motivation theory, the purpose of Law's research was to discuss the appropriate uses of bonuses and awards in motivating employees. Law determined that managers can use bonuses and awards to mitigate and delay turnover and to motivate employees to increase their work performance. Homberg, McCarthy, and Tabvuma (2015) researched employee motivation using the public service motivation theory. According to public service motivation theory, when the opportunity exists for employees to express their prosocial

motivators to serve the public, they are satisfied and committed to their work. Gould-Williams (2016) used found that managers who demonstrate a genuine interest in employees' well-being provide a motivating culture.

In their research on organizational identity, Kumar and Jauhari (2016) conceptualized the love need aspect of Maslow's theory. The purpose was to test whether satisfaction of performance and relatedness needs in the workplace influenced the employees' identification with the organization. Kumar and Jauhari concluded that managers should provide employees the opportunity to improve their abilities by promoting training in the workplace. Crumpton (2016) considered Maslow's grumble theory in a study that involved comparing high, low, and meta grumbles and determining the financial effect of grumbles on an organization. Crumpton indicated that listening to and understanding employee grumbles can assist in solving organization issues. Strategically investing in the source of grumbles by addressing concerns can improve the culture and improve the manager-employee relationship (Crumpton, 2016).

Alderfer's ERG theory of motivation. Alderfer (1969) modified Maslow's five levels of needs into three levels: existence, relatedness, and growth (ERG). Alderfer's need for existence coincided with Maslow's physiological needs. Alderfer noted that the need for relatedness is on an individuals' ability to maintain relationships in their social and business lives. The need for growth encourages self-development and reveals one's potential (Turabik & Baskan, 2015). In contrast to Maslow's theory in which satisfaction of the inferior level needs occurred first, Alderfer believed that individuals might seek to satisfy the superior level needs first. This might be more likely if an individual chooses to

focus on growth within an organization first and building relationships second (Ho, 2016).

Vroom's expectancy theory. Vroom (1964) developed the expectancy theory of work motivation to explore motivating factors, which determine an individual's willingness to exert a personal effort toward the success of an organization. The expectancy theory includes three constructs for motivation: expectancy, instrumentality, and valence. Ernst (2015) discussed the expectancy theory and summarized expectancy as a transitory certainty followed by a result. Instrumentality involves a person's awareness of the possibility that performance will result in a precise conclusion, and valence includes emotional perspectives regarding certain outcomes (Ernst, 2015). Vroom hypothesized that all three factors affect the motivation of an individual; however, if one factor is lacking motivation, the individual will not become motivated for the task (Lee, 2007). According to Nimri, Bdair, and Al Bitar (2015), the expectancy theory can assist organization leaders in understanding that employee motivation exists when employees believe the work performed will lead to rewards, such as higher salary or improved benefits. The expectancy theory supports the development of motivating strategies related to performance and awards. Nimri et al. revealed that some employees do not have a self-interest in motivation or engagement.

Locke and Latham's goal-setting theory. The goal setting theory was developed to emphasize the practical implications for the motivation of employees in the business environment (Locke & Latham, 1990) Locke and Latham revealed the goal theory of motivation includes an assumption that once individuals decide to pursue a goal, they

regulate their behavior to accomplish the goal. Neubert and Dyck (2016) researched the goal-setting theory and conceptualized this theory is suitable for exploring the reasons some employees worked harder and are more motivated within the work environment. The theory of goal setting serves as a useful approach to work motivation and performance in the workplace (Deschamps & Mattijs, 2017).

Researchers such as Alderfer, Herzberg, Maslow, and McClelland have stated motivation research has an extensive history of considering the needs and motives of employees (Rahman & Nurullah, 2014). As businesses grow, researchers have revealed a need for more motivational models to correspond with policies and procedures to assist organizational leaders to reach the goal of a motivated workforce (Rahman & Nurullah, 2014). Motivational theories are significant to managers because there are no viable solutions to the question of what motivates people to perform well in their jobs (Szalma, 2014). Managers use leader-employee relationship theories to examine the most effective motivational style by providing a framework of how to motivate employees toward an organization's goals (Rahman & Nurullah, 2014).

Leader-Member Exchange Theory

The leader-member exchange theory (LMX) is an important framework for understanding leadership and its effects on employees (Cropanzano, Dasborough, & Weiss, 2017). The LMX theory is distinct with a core belief that leaders develop differential relationships with their employees and the differences in the quality of those relationships have important outcomes for the leader-employee engagement relationship (Dulebohn, Wu, & Liao, 2017). Nie and Lämsä (2015) informed that LMX can assist

leaders and employees encountering organizational demands and provides a chance for social, emotional, and moral development. The LMX theory applies to the working relationship between the leader and the employee and is embedded into two main theories: role theory and social exchange theory (Nie & Lämsä, 2015). Researchers have used the LMX theory to characterize the interactions between leaders and employees, theorizing the significant impact of those interactions on the successful processes of an organization (Kim & Koo, 2017).

Social exchange theory. The social exchange theory was developed from the term *reciprocity*. Reciprocity represents a dyadic relation between two persons in an organizational context: leaders and employees (Gilliam & Rayburn, 2016). Vidyarathi et al. (2014) also agreed the dyadic level of leadership in the LMX suggests that a leader's actions do affect employees. Social exchange creates a feeling of obligation on the part of employees to reciprocate their leader's trust in the organization (Oparaocha, 2016). Reciprocity as an organizational value has received attention in management research, linked with emerging trust between employees and management (Hollensbe, Wookey, Hickey, George, & Nichols, 2014). Social exchange theory is an important management issue for businesses because it arises from daily interpersonal interactions and thus affects subsequent working outcomes of businesses (Gu, Tang, & Jiang, 2015). Social exchange theory is among the most influential conceptual models for understanding workplace interactions and shaping work environments (Karanges, Johnston, Beatson, & Lings, 2015).

The initial focus of the social exchange theory is on an individual's behavior and later moves to research on leader-employee reciprocity relationships (Dan-shang & Chia-chun, 2013; Hollensbe et al., 2014). Researchers collaborating in the social exchange theory have indicated that when employees perceive their leaders as consistent between words and actions, the employees are more likely to engage with their leaders (Dan-shang & Chia-chun, 2013). Leaders should develop self-awareness and become role models for communication in an organization, as motivation in businesses depends on the leader's communications and actions (Dan-shang & Chia-chun, 2013). The research findings of Dan-shang and Chia-chun included implications for leaders and revealed employees evaluate the words and actions of their leaders; thus, the consistency of words and actions from leaders improves employee engagement, which increases productivity and profitability. Motivation is an adhesive force that links people, processes, and the environment and can become a positive force that improves the leader-employee engagement relationship (Dan-shang & Chia-chun, 2013).

Role theory. The concept of the role theory has been explored before the 1900s but did not become common knowledge until the 1930s (VanderHorst, 2016). VanderHorst (2016) stated the basis of the role theory is that individuals have different roles which determine their various actions. Carpenter and Lertpratchya (2016) agreed with VanderHorst but added the role theory also determine how individuals integrate into business culture. The role theory is a useful resource for organizational leaders because it reveals how work behaviors are related to the company (Boh & Wong, 2013; Carpenter & Lertpratchya, 2016).

The role theory involves exploring individuals' role repertoire, which allows them to interact with various social groups (Schulz, 2015). In addition, researchers use the role theory to explore the acceptance of individuals' roles as a continuous process leading toward promoting positive interactions in leader-employee relationships (Shivers-Blackwell, 2004). Within businesses, role theory can be beneficial in understanding the perceived role of the leader. Boh and Wong (2013) reported that scholars have recognized that a leader's role is important for sharing knowledge among employees. Erkmen and Esen (2014) suggested that if leaders use effective and efficient communication to relay negative or positive information regarding the organization, a sense of trust will grow between leaders and employees, which can improve employee engagement as well as increase productivity and profitability.

Cognitive and Affect-based Trust Theories

Trust is the foundation of all successful leader-employee relationships (Bulatova, 2015). Researchers have identified trust as the main factor that binds employees and management in an organization. Trust forms the effectiveness of cooperation, with employees, providing such access to information (Bulatova, 2015). Trust is also one of the key assets in promoting organization performance and employee work attitudes (Baek & Jung, 2015). Corgnet, Espín, Hernán-González, Kujal, and Rassenti, (2016) reported trust is cognitive-based because individuals cognitively select the individual they will trust under which condition.

Affective trust and cognitive trust have received attention from various researchers. Ren, Shu, Bao, and Chen (2016) noted that organizational leaders should

consider the use of cognitive and affective trust to improve employee engagement.

Newman, Kiazad, Miao, and Cooper (2014) indicated a need for researchers to explore the impact of affective and cognitive trust on organizational citizenship behaviors.

Affective and cognitive-based trust impact desired employee behaviors differently, and cognitive trust may function as a prerequisite for developing affective trust (Xu, 2014).

Cognitive trust is important in providing a foundation for developing motivating social exchange relationships between employees and their leaders (Newman et al., 2014).

Camgoz and Karapinar (2016) performed an empirical work-study on the trust–commitment relationship and viewed trust as an important aspect in developing sustainable, long-term relational interactions between employees and leaders within an organization. Affect-based trust reflects an individual’s view of another person’s values, norms, and emotional ties (Huggins, White, & Stahl, 2016). McAllister (1995) referenced emotional ties as influencing the improvement of the engagement process between the manager and the employee as they engage in the development of internal communication. Cognitive-based trust reflects a person’s valuation of another person’s ability and trustworthiness regarding work (Ozyilmaz, Erdogan, & Karaeminogullari, 2017).

Relational trust, associated with affective-based trust, relates to reciprocity and the religious aspect of affective trust (Dowell, Morrison, & Heffernan, 2015). This concept includes a belief in doing unto others that which individuals want others to do unto them (Eikeland, 2015). Intuitive trust is a judgment reflecting one’s personal judgment of the character of others (Iannello, Balconi, & Antonietti, 2014). Dowell et al. (2015) examined the impact of the affective and cognitive trust on relationship

performance in business to gain an understanding of how these relationships have evolved. Dowell et al. determined these two types of trust change as the relationship evolves.

Leaders can maintain a trusting relationship with their employees and improve employee engagement in numerous ways (Ariyabuddhiphongs & Kahn, 2017).

Ariyabuddhiphongs and Kahn (2017) and Rai (2016) both suggested that leaders should practice humility, eliminate competition within the workplace, and create a trusting environment to improve employee engagement to increase productivity and profitability. Pattison and Kline (2015) discussed the trust relationship between leaders and employees, stating researchers have studied the trust relationship in various areas using communication and leadership as examples. These researchers supported that productivity and profitability can increase if trust exists among organizational members, particularly between an employee and a leader.

Leaders who want to build trust, increase participation, accept change, and understand communication, create an important opportunity to build trust (Guinalú & Jordán, 2016). Building a relationship of trust takes place over time, and it is important for leaders at the managerial level to understand the importance of being worthy of employees' trust. Guinalú and Jordán contended that leaders can have valid intentions regarding the future of an employee's position in a business, but if trust does not exist, the organization will have limited success. Trust is essential in leader-employee relationships and virtue must exist if an organization is going to overcome challenges and

strategically increase the level of employee engagement (Ugwu, Onyishi, & Rodríguez-Sánchez, 2015).

The MLT, LMX, and cognitive and affect-based trust theories are complex theories with no single solution to what motivates people (Buble, Juras, & Matic, 2014). Therefore, using variations of the theories is important in managerial positions because managers who understand the many motivational theories can use the most efficient means of communication to motivate people to work well. Leadership and motivation connect and are especially productive when the leader is motivated (Buble, Juras, & Matic, 2014). An understanding of motivation is a powerful management tool in achieving organizational goals through employee engagement.

Employee Engagement

Kahn's (1990) conceptual foundation on employee work engagement set the mark for other researchers to conduct further research regarding employee engagement (Shuck & Wollard, 2010). Engagement is a motivational construct, which is defined as the employment and countenance of an individual's chosen work conduct that encourages positive working relationships (Ford, Myrden, & Jones, 2015). Kahn indicated the degree in which people interact physically, cognitively, and emotionally in their work role dictates the level in which individuals engage or disengage (Zamin Abbas, Sohaib Murad, Yazdani, & Asghar, 2014). Kahn developed the engagement theory, which stipulates that under the right conditions, individuals will engage in their positions and the organization. Employees are a critical part of an organization's efficiency, which along with

productivity has become vital for businesses remain sustainable (Jauhari & Kumar, 2016).

Many researchers have noted that engagement enhances not only the nonfinancial performance but also the financial performance of an organization (Jauhari & Kumar, 2016). Engagement is also about the accountability of each employee to improve team building, encourage communication, and assist in creating an environment of cultural diversity, which can improve the organization's engagement initiative (Nazir & Islam, 2017). Organizational leaders, therefore, must work to develop, encourage, and motivate employees to develop positive attitudes and behaviors that will enable them to increase the productivity and profitability of the business (Eneh & Awara, 2016; Maghraoui & Zidai, 2016; Taneja et al., 2014).

Employee engagement has developed as a challenge in businesses. Mishra, Boynton, and Mishra (2014) researched employee engagement and revealed the concern for employee engagement in business, citing the many intricacies and rigorous regulations that continue to challenge strategies to improve employee engagement. In recent studies on employee engagement, businesses with successful strategies for developing employee engagement have experienced increased customer satisfaction, profits, and employee productivity (Ahmetoglu, Harding, Akhtar, & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2015). Stoyanova and Iliev (2017) discovered the use of employee engagement practices in businesses reveal quality outcomes, such as greater productivity, profitability, and employee loyalty. Engaged employees generate sustainability, which allows the organization to surpass the typical industry growth in its profits.

Drivers of employee engagement. Employee engagement is critical and if the managers do not use the correct communications strategy, it could possibly affect employee morale, productivity and profitability (Xiong & King, 2015). Employee engagement is the backbone of an organization, and respect, trust, and performance are its foundation (Davila & Piña-Ramírez, 2014). Researchers have explored three distinct drivers of engagement. The first driver is the manager-employee relationship, which is the most important driver for determining employees' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with an organization. The manager-employee relationship is about communication, and a manager has the challenge of forming professional relationships beneficial to the organization, the manager, and the employee (Davila & Piña-Ramírez, 2014). Intrinsic motivation is the second driver. Intrinsic motivation refers to unrewarded activities performed by the employee (Nobuo, 2015). Employee engagement depends on employees' need to acquire a powerful sense of purpose in their work and to find value in what they do, without depending on external factors to determine their level of engagement of trust in an organization (Davila & Piña-Ramírez, 2014).

The final driver the researchers discussed was leadership. Not all managers are leaders, and not all leaders are managers, but it is the responsibility of the manager to foster employee engagement (Davila & Piña-Ramírez, 2014). Bârgau (2015) researched leadership versus management and noted the importance of distinguishing the difference. Managers assist in developing and maintaining the functionality of the workplace, whereas leaders challenge, inspire, and persuade employees. Moral supervision, respectable coworker relations, training and development, and rewards and recognition

are prominent drivers of employee engagement (Krishnaveni & Monica, 2016).

Improving the drivers leads to organizational effectiveness, which eventually leads to a competitive advantage.

Employee engagement and employee performance. Anitha (2014) studied the factors of employee engagement and the effect on employee performance. Anitha performed a causal study to reveal the impact of the relationship between engagement and performance and subsequently determined that employee engagement had a substantial effect on employee performance. Anitha also revealed the importance of a respectable working environment and team and coworker relationships, which had a significantly high impact on employee engagement and employee performance. According to Bakker, Demerouti, and Sanz-Vergel (2014), when managers' make a concerted effort to improve employee engagement in the organization, the results lead to enhanced employee performance.

Gupta and Sharma (2016) explored employee engagement as an approach to better business performance. The aim of the research conducted by Gupta and Sharma was to provide exploratory measures into the concept of employee engagement and performance. The results indicated employee engagement and performance is a boundless process in organizational improvement. Although there are many definitions for employee engagement, Gupta and Sharma defined employee engagement as a combination of employee obligation, participation, connection, and positive attitudes towards the organization's goals, which guides the employees' performance, ultimately leading to organizational success (Gupta & Sharma, 2016).

Researchers have noted the quality of physical working environments leads to improved performance and supports higher output (Panchanatham & Jayalakshmi, 2016; Yeh & Huan, 2017). Razig and Maulabakhsh (2015) revealed a working environment comprised of collaboration, responsible leaders, appropriate physical surroundings, and job security can enhance the motivation of workers and contribute to improved performance; therefore, organizational leaders and employers should concentrate on improving the working environments in diverse ways to improve employee engagement as it relates to improved performance.

Employee engagement and productivity. Engaged employees increase productivity and reduce disparity over time, which may increase an organization's productivity and performance (Mackay, Allen, & Landis, 2017). Developing collaborative teams within an organization may create immeasurable prospects to increase productivity (Hamnett & Baker, 2012). Inadequacies in businesses have increased the percentage of change; however, if employees' work engagement increases, company leaders may not have to make modification in the work process as often, which could create an unchanging workforce (Hamnett & Baker, 2012). Engaging the hearts and minds of employees is an organizational challenge but remains a major business differentiator (Itam & Singh, 2017).

Maintaining a level of productivity to increase profits in an organization can be a sustainable strategy. If an organization adheres to a culture of productivity to increase its competitiveness in the marketplace, this could lead to unexpected negative effects (Ye & King, 2016). Ye and King researched productivity-oriented businesses, defining these as

businesses that uphold elevated levels of internal productivity. These researchers revealed productivity orientation can yield immediate results, but can also negatively influence employees' quality of performance, job fulfillment, and engagement in the organization, through constant change and performance stress. To mitigate the effects of productivity orientation negatively affecting the employees, Ye and King suggested managers use cautionary approaches when implementing a productivity orientation culture because it can reap positive (increased productivity) and negative (decreased productivity) organizational benefits.

Shirley and Hites (2015) also researched the effects that productivity has on engagement in businesses from the perspective of productivity being mistaken for busyness instead of strategic work. These scholars defined *busyness* as an exhausting, unsustainable working model which can ultimately engross an employee's workday, preventing meaningful work to be accomplished. To close the gap in the progression of busyness, Shirley and Hites suggested managers should promote energy that encourages engagement, usefulness, productivity, and improvement within the organization.

Although employee engagement can positively affect productivity in an organization, the positive short-term productivity profits can negatively affect the organization's long-term success if not efficiently managed (Shirley & Hites, 2015; Ye & King, 2016).

Employee engagement and profitability. The theory of employee engagement is advancing in the corporate world (Zelles, 2015). Businesses with a higher level of engagement among employees experience higher profits and produce a higher return on assets to maintain a market value that exceeds the replacement costs of assets (Rao,

2017). Gebauer and Lowman (2009) conducted research on closing the engagement gap and noted employees' attitudes and actions constitute an organization's capability to transform and create revenue growth and margin improvement. The findings from their research indicated companies with elevated levels of engagement experience above-average financial reports in comparison with companies with low-levels of engagement. The companies with higher levels of employee engagement displayed a 71% increase in their financial profits, whereas the companies with lower-levels of engagement among employees experienced a 62% decrease in their financial gains (Gebauer & Lowman, 2009). Zak (2017) discussed the problems organizational leaders are encountering with employee engagement and noted that leaders understand low engagement can result in lost value. This author suggested creating a culture of trust could help to correct the problem. Zak's meta-analysis results indicated the rewards of high engagement could result in high productivity, improved product quality, and increased profitability.

Rao (2017) conducted research on employee engagement using innovative tools and practices to explore effective employee engagement. Rao disclosed the advantages of employee engagement for the organization and the employee, as well as the reasons for employee disengagement. Organizational leaders can view the positive results of the implementation of employee engagement strategies when employees enjoy returning to work to contribute their best to improve organizational bottom lines (Rao, 2017). When organizational leaders create a toxic environment that lacks a value system within the organization, employees become dispirited, feel unmotivated, and feel unappreciated, which leads to disengagement (Boddy & Croft, 2016; Chua & Murray, 2015).

Employee disengagement. Disengagement occurs when an employee withdraws his or her physical, cognitive, and emotional roles from work (Kahn, 1990). Employee disengagement is a key factor in declining productivity and declining profitability in business, which can result in absenteeism, higher cost, and inferior performance (Coward, 2014). Elements affecting employee disengagement are broad and evasive; Rao (2017) determined a toxic organizational environment, disengaged leaders, and organizational politics, are key issues in disengagement and can result in the demise of an organization.

Pech and Slade (2006) acknowledged the conflicting and circumstantial evidence reveals that levels of employee disengagement are rising and noted that some managers seem reluctant or incapable of preventing the incline. In the practical implications of the study, disengagement resulted from various sources and environments. After the implications for disengagement are identified, managers can analyze the failing employee obligation to their organization's goals. Pech and Slade noted the occurrence of employee disengagement is growing but cited the strategies for identifying the cause are insufficient. Ford et al. (2015) provided insight into some strategies that may prevent disengagement. In their cross-sectional study, Ford et al. revealed knowledge sharing is critical to organizational success. Disengagement of knowledge sharing reflects a lack of communication in the organization from managers to employees and from employees to employees.

Al Mehrzi and Singh (2016) explored employee disengagement to understand what deters employee engagement. Some reasons employees disengaged are financial reasons, difficulties in interactions with managers, a lack of career development, or

workplace bullying. Employee disengagement aids in loss productivity and profitability, which leads to higher turnover rates, absenteeism, and reduced performance (Coward, 2014). According to Reilly (2014), researchers have argued that disengaged employees are dissatisfied and spread unhappiness throughout the business. Not only are they dissatisfied at work, they are determined to display an undesirable behavior. When an engaged employee resolves a problem through innovation and collaboration, the disengaged employee attempts to undermine the success (Reilly, 2014).

Jindal, Shaikh, and Shashank (2017) performed a case study to reflect the effect of disengaged employees. Jindal et al. advised that the disengaged employees do not take their position seriously and will not go beyond the description of their position to complete tasks. The passion exhibited by disengaged employees toward their work and the organization is minimal. Disengaged employees negatively affect the employees as well as the organization. To discourage negativity among employees, management must have the proper capabilities to manage the employees effectively, which includes internal communications that demonstrate respectful, sociable, responsible, empathetic, and proactive behavior toward employees (Nazir & Islam, 2017). Friedman and Gerstein (2017) suggested an environment of empathy and trust must infuse the organization to generate a culture of engaged employees.

Employee engagement and knowledge sharing. Zhang and Jiang (2015) examined the phenomenon of knowledge sharing from the perspectives of recipients' characteristics. Zhang and Jiang stated the strategies managers use to encourage employees to seek knowledge from colleagues by considering the composition of team

members could encourage each member to develop a knowledge base and make a concerted effort to develop a climate of trust. Han, Seo, Yoon, and Yoon (2016) examined the role of a leader in the knowledge-sharing process. The value content from the research indicated structural determinants of knowledge sharing as an important scholarly agenda. Leadership uses influences to motivate employees to share knowledge, but a need exists for more research to understand the process of leadership's influence on individual motivation and attitudes toward knowledge sharing.

Management strategies to improve employee engagement. Employee engagement is an essential element in the success of an organization. According to Mishra et al. (2014), the workday operations of an employee can have an impact on their personal lives. Therefore, the strategies managers use to improve employee engagement should include creating a meaningful environment that fosters guidance, direction, and good internal communications (McManus & Mosca, 2015; Ugwu et al., 2014). This can be challenging; however, according to McManus and Mosca, implementing a culture where employees are appreciated and respected would generate an environment of motivated and empowered employees.

Internal communication. Internal communication refers to communication between an organization's leaders and employees (Mishra et al., 2014). Mishra et al. indicated companies are beginning to understand the importance of efficient and effective internal communications. Internal communication is imperative for maintaining an environment of transparency, which can promote a culture of engaged employees (Mishra et al., 2014). According to Verghese (2017), using internal communications effectively,

can enhance the manager/employee relationship, which can ultimately motivate the employee to increase productivity. Kang and Sung (2017) conducted a study regarding the use of two-way symmetrical internal communication in companies. Symmetrical internal communications occur when organizational decisions become a collaborative effort between the organization and the interested parties (Men & Jiang, 2016; Ni, Wang, & De la Flor, 2015). Using two-way symmetrical internal communications in businesses can build a growing environment of motivated and satisfied employees to facilitate a working relationship between the manager and the employee (Steyn, Steyn, & van Rooyen, 2011).

Karanges et al. (2015) conducted a study in internal communication and found three contributing factors in understanding internal communications and employee engagement. The first contributing factor identified the significance of the manager and organization communication strategies. The second factor contributed to the social exchange theory by suggesting internal communication aids in the interactions between the organization, supervisor, and employees. Karanges et al. suggested internal communication can reinforce workplace associations based on value and integrity. The final contributing factor was the impact internal communications has in collaborating the leader-employee relationship. Internal communication is important, and leaders often underestimate this factor (Karanges et al., 2015; Karodia, Cassim, & Zondi, 2015; Verghese, 2017).

When organization managers maintain effective communication with employees, the dialogue allows positive two-way communication regarding the organization's goals

and mission. Constantin and Baias (2015) researched effective communication, specifically, employee voice; they concluded positive internal communication can assist in building the employees' loyalty and trust in management. Constantin and Baias also noted internal communication should provide employees' a chance to voice their opinions, share their views, and address concerns regarding the future of the organization. Effective employee voice offers the employees the opportunity to enhance their understanding and work relationships to contribute to the organization's decision-making process. Informed employee voice contributes to employee engagement and subsequently improves productivity. Implementing an informed employee voice tactic to internal communication is relevant and it specifies an understanding of the value of effective communication in a business (Constantin & Baias, 2015; Mazzei, 2014).

O'Neill, Hodgson, and Mazrouei (2015) researched the relationship between employee engagement and effective communication. O'Neill et al. stated internal communication is an important driver of employee engagement because it connects the employee to the company by motivating and engaging the employees in the business. Internal communication keeps employees abreast of changes and provides information on regulation and compliance (O'Neill et al., 2015). In addition, the use of internal communication in businesses can build channels to improve communication and collaboration in the manager-employee relationship. The use of internal communication can have a positive effect on a companies' initiative; however, if used incorrectly, it can cause a crisis (Zaumane, 2016). Zaumane explored the negativity of internal communications and revealed when internal communications become a crisis, employees

explore other means such as independent businesses to assist in resolving the company issues. As a result, this could damage the reputation of the business.

Mazzei and Ravazzani (2015) explored communication crisis and discovered some businesses have poor internal communications, which result in decreased employee loyalty, declining motivation, and the discouragement of employee engagement. However, understanding the company's culture, will assist the manager to strategically identify the problem and take appropriate actions (Strandberg & Vigos, 2016). According to King and Lee (2016), building effective internal communication channels aid in generating commonality within the business. Communication is important and vital to the manager-employee relationship (King & Lee, 2016). If a manager or leader understands how to converse with an employee, the performance results are high (Răducan, R., & Răducan R., 2014). Leaders must ensure employees have a balanced system of satisfied needs to maintain a dialogue of effective internal communication (Răducan, R., & Răducan, R., 2014).

According to Ayub, Manaf, and Hamzah (2014), managers hold multiple roles in setting a strong example of effective communication. If the managers do not communicate effectively in their interactions with employees, the repercussions throughout the company can be serious. Poor communication can impede the communication process within a company. Strategies to generate effective communication can be a crucial element in a companies' success. Ayub et al. suggested when a leader communicates effectively, the manager-employee relationship will strengthen, which can allow the company to reach its goals.

The work of Herzberg and Maslow satisfied what it means to motivate an individual (Ayub et al., 2014). Leadership is also often synonymous with impact, in which a leader's communication style could engage and motivate the employees to perform to a higher degree, which could increase the productivity of the business. Engagement and motivation are recurrent challenges in leadership and is a function of the position a manager (Ayub et al., 2014). Thus, both motivation and engagement create a vibrant leadership style, and employees depend regularly on the manager's enthusiasm to assist in the daily work-related challenges (Al-Sada, Al-Esmael, & Faisal, 2017; Bhatti et al., 2016).

For any business to continue successfully, efficient leadership is an essential factor in the success of the company's productivity and profitability (Sprunger, 2014). When a company has effective leadership, supervision, and management, it can offer the strategies needed to generate clear directions for employees to help guide the company in the proper direction (Sprunger, 2014). Guiding a business involves charting the course, which is an essential part of leadership (Mehta & Maheshwari, 2016). It also means having the skill to convey direction as both determine the accomplishment of business objectives with fluctuating degrees of success (Mitchell, 2015). Leadership communication models such as Blake and Mouton's managerial grid model sends a continuous message that leaders, regardless of their leadership style, must develop and implement communication strategies using the communication process, empowerment, and transparency (Begum & Mujtaba, 2016).

Empowerment. The goal of empowerment is to provide employees with a considerable amount of authority and information to assist the company in some decision-making processes (Begzadeh & Nedaei, 2017; Weidenstedt, 2016). Empowerment involves providing the receiver with a greater sense of control and self-efficacy. McFarland, Wagner, and Marklin (2016) stated a greater sense of control has a significant effect on the success of the leader-employee relationship. Jose and Mampilly (2014) studied empowerment and employee engagement and identified the attention to empowerment and employee engagement has grown significantly among practitioners and academicians. Conger and Kanungo (1988) pioneered the motivational approach to empowerment and reported employee empowerment as an essential contributor to the success of the business. Ogbeide, Böser, Harrinton, and Ottenbacher (2017) acknowledged empowerment as a process of enhanced emotions amongst managers and employees, which enhances the employees' level of control and motivates them to engage in work. Employee empowerment can result in positive outcomes for the company.

Transparency. The focus of transparency is sharing information (Farrell, 2016). Transparency refers to open communication, which results in collaborative decision making within the business (Niculescu, 2015). Transparent communication in a company generates trust and credibility for the employee, which can improve employee engagement and have a positive effect on the company's success (Jiang & Men, 2015). Leaders who incorporate transparency communicate trust in the business. Transparency

builds unity within a business and helps employees understand the goals of the company (Farrell, 2016).

Transparent businesses are open to sharing information within and across the company's culture. An open culture of internal knowledge sharing results in employees feeling more engaged in their job role and providing higher performance (Parris, Dapko, Arnold, & Arnold, 2016). Using transparency enhances employee engagement because employees understand their position in the company collaboratively corresponds with the business strategy (Parris et al., 2016). In addition, generating a culture of transparency in businesses may promote internal communication and employee engagement, which could lead to an effective business and more multiparty decisions. According to Farrell (2016), transparency is positively associated with employee engagement. Business leaders who demonstrate transparent leadership create a culture of inclusion in the decision-making process. Although transparency may be challenging to define, leaders who attempt to improve employee engagement in their company could possibly increase productivity and increase profitability (Farrell, 2016).

Leadership Styles and Employee Engagement

Researchers studying the potency of leadership styles on employee engagement have suggested engagement stems from the growth of manager-employee relationships through positive communication (Howell, 2017; Popli & Rizvi, 2015). Kelly and MacDonald (2016) stated leaders demonstrating positive leadership styles, exemplify an open channel of communication and create an environment that influences solidarity in the company. The style of the leader affects the performance of the employee, which

could have a positive or negative effect on the productivity and profitability of a business (Bambale, Barwa, & Girei, 2017).

Leadership style refers to a relatively consistent pattern of behavior displayed by a leader or manager while addressing and influencing subordinates (Popli & Rizvi, 2015). The style of the leader may increase the performance of a business in attaining the desired goals; alternatively, this style can have a negative effect on the business performance and the attitudes of the employees (Hussain & Hassan, 2016). Leadership and leadership styles are fertile areas of research; Sudha, Shahnawaz, and Farhat (2016) reported a direct connection exists between leadership styles and employee engagement. Various leadership styles can negatively impact employee engagement in an business, however, this study seeks to explore those leadership styles, which possess qualities to improve employee engagement and increase productivity as well as profitability (Mekpor & Dartey-Baah, 2017)

Servant leadership. The origin of servant leadership is derived from Greenleaf (1977), who suggested the relationship between a manager and an employee is positive when the manager encourages a relationship that increases the employee's confidence (Seto & Sarros, 2016). Seto and Sarros noted servant leaders are individuals who place the needs of employees before their own and transform employees to expand their knowledge regarding the business and their goals for the future. In their research of servant leadership, Sendjaya and Sarros (2002) referenced Greenleaf, who coined the term *servant leadership* by researching corporate leaders. According to Sendjaya and Sarros, Jesus Christ was the first to introduce servant leadership, and the narrative

accounts of the life of Jesus referenced in the Bible are evidence of the existence of servant leadership centuries ago.

Servant leadership is a style that involves building trust and motivating others—not just in the leader-follower relationship, but in the leader-leader and employee-employee relationship (Du Plessis, Wakelin, & Nel, 2015). Du Plessis et al. described the servant leader as a deep-rooted individual with a desire to make positive changes in the lives of others. Begzabeh and Nedaei (2017) cited a leader who demonstrates servant leadership implements strategies to develop positive relationships with the employees. The servant leader accepts the role of a servant and forgoes self-interest to increase engagement and motivation (Begzabeh & Nedaei, 2017).

Servant leaders also understand the importance of employee engagement in obtaining and sustaining competitive advantage (Gutierrez-Wirching, Mayfield, Mayfield, & Wang, 2015). Servant leaders treat employees with respect and empowers them in their positions (Gutierrez-Wirching et al., 2015). The servant leader also understands inconsistencies are necessary to attain creativity; most importantly, the servant leader creates a culture of engagement to assist the employees in understanding their value in the company (Gutierrez-Wirching, et al., 2015).

Participative leadership. Sarti (2014) characterized participative leadership as a collaborating decision-making process to increase employee participation in identifying innovative strategies to resolve business issues. The goal in participative leadership is to provide the employees with more discretion, attention, support, and involvement in solving problems and making decisions, which may enable the leader to efficiently reach

business goals (Lynch, 2017). Many leaders, however, do not embrace this type of leadership because some believe employee participation enables them to lose some control (Lam, Huang, & Chan, 2015). Even though some leaders believe participative leadership may reduce their power and control, there are developing indications that participative leadership creates positive employee work attitudes toward engagement (Miao et al., 2013). In a study of leadership styles to engage employees, Sarti (2014) revealed the participative leadership decision-making style is predominantly significant in forecasting vigor and commitment among employees. Participative decision making implies the decision-making process is not regulated by and reserved for leaders; everyone gains the chance to contribute to the decision-making process (Bouwman, Runhaar, Wesseling, & Mulder, 2017).

Authentic leadership. Authentic leadership enhances the employees' desire to engage in the business strategic goals (Steffens, Mols, Haslam, & Okimoto, 2016). Olaniyan and Hystad (2016) investigated the influence of authentic leadership on employees' job satisfaction and concluded employees who perceive their leader as authentic are more satisfied in their jobs, which can ultimately lead to improved employee engagement. Onorato and Zhu (2014) researched authentic leadership and referenced General George Washington before he became president of the United States as a symbol of authentic leadership. James Madison convinced Washington to lead the convention and stand as a signal of strength. Onorato and Zhu noted the presence of Washington at the convention had a significant effect on the people, which demonstrated

the type of positive authentic leadership that falls short in business leadership in the 21st century.

Authentic researchers aim to define what is moral for the leader, the employee, and the business (Onorato & Zhu, 2014). Stander, de Beer, and Stander (2015) discussed authentic leadership on optimism trust, describing optimism trust as the level of positive future experiences beneficial to the physical and psychological needs of an individual (Schwabsky, 2014). Much like transformational leadership, authentic leadership inspires and motivates employees. This style of leadership was valuable in studies of employee engagement (Stander et al., 2015).

Transformational leadership. Mozammel and Haan (2016) researched the effects of transformational leadership on employee engagement. These authors revealed transformational leadership is essential in business to improve employee engagement as well as increase productivity and profitability. Burns (1978) originated the term transformational leadership. Transformational leadership encompasses the interactions of employees and leaders in the act of assisting each other in achieving business goals (Liu & Berry, 2015). Transformational leadership is significant in the leader-employee relationship and is believed to be sufficient for the status quo (Moolenaar & Slegers, 2015). The use of transformational leadership enables the leader to recognize the needs of the employees and attempts to increase the needs for higher levels of development in engagement (Moolenaar & Slegers, 2015).

Zhu and Akhtar (2014) also discussed transformational leadership as it applies to the leader-employee relationship. According to Zhu and Akhtar, transformational

leadership empowers employees and considers their individual needs. When employees experience transformational leadership, the employees feel appreciated and will begin to develop an engaging relationship and trust in their leader (Zhu & Akhtar, 2014). Bui, Higgs, and Zeng (2017) researched transformational leadership and job engagement. The purpose of this study was to examine the correlation between the transformational leader and the employees' engagement grounded in the fit theory.

Bui et al. (2017) discovered transformational leadership has an important impact on employee engagement regarding person-job fit. Person-job fit relates to the customs and values of the business and the principles of the employee (Ünal & Turgut, 2015). Afsar and Badir (2017) researched the mediating effects of person-job fit as it relates to employee engagement and revealed when a person has an elevated level of fit, he or she tends to engage more and reciprocate by demonstrating positive work attitudes to increase productivity and increase the business profits. Based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Bui et al. (2017) assumed transformational leaders improve employee's person-job fit.

Liang, Chang, Ko, and Lin (2017) explored transformational leadership and discussed the positive effects transformational leaders have on employees. Liang et al. stated transformational leaders can improve employee effectiveness by inspiring employee engagement through creativity. Henker, Sonnentag, and Unger (2015) and Zhou and Pan (2015) both researched transformational leadership and employee creativity. The authors cited understanding the relationship between creativity and

transformational leadership allows the leader to generate an environment that nurtures creativity, which encourages engagement in the company.

Transformational leadership is important to the success of the business; thus, leaders at all levels should educate themselves with collaborating, transparent, and empowering strategies for the employee (Kroon, van Woerkom, & Menting, 2017). Bai, Chen, Yang, and Zheng (2016) noted transformational leadership inspires innovation. Liang et al. (2017) indicated transformational leadership impacts work engagement and employee voice. According to Tabassi, Roufechaei, Abu Bakar, and Yusof (2017), transformational leaders aim to transform individuals to surpass the status quo to improve their ability in innovation and adjustment in the working environment.

The foundation of transformational leadership in generating innovativeness has developed into sustainable growth in companies (Raj & Srivastava, 2017). Moreover, Salem (2015) suggested transformational leadership may become the most critical type of leadership. Transformational leaders demonstrate the skill to communicate the company's vision in a rapidly changing environment (Salem, 2015). Businesses seeking to generate positive employee engagement should adopt the transformational style of leadership because transformational leaders positively affect the employees' dedication to the company (Muthia & Krishnan, 2015).

Ethical leadership. Ethical leadership is different from other types. It affects a variety of significant work relationships (Neubert, Wu, & Roberts, 2013). Ethical leadership is different from other leadership types because its focus is on the ethical aspects of leadership (Chughtai, Byrne, & Flood, 2015). Ethical leadership involves a

leader participating in decision-making, demonstrating concern, and building a trust-based relationship with employees. Ethical leadership is a recent expansion of leadership, and it has become an interesting subject among academics (Naiyananont & Smuthranond, 2017). Kalshoven, van Dijk, and Boon (2016) performed research on ethical leadership based on the social learning theory and revealed ethical leaders generate a motivating workforce by using two-way communication and corroboration. The result of this interest in ethical leadership might accredit the recent ethical scandals in businesses.

Corporate scandals have raised awareness of ethical issues in business leadership (Wu, Kwan, Yim, Chiu, & He, 2015). The motivation for ethical leadership research has resulted from the increase in corporate scandals and the unethical behavior of leaders in leading global businesses (Lawton & Páez, 2015). Ethical leadership refers to the display of appropriate behavior through leader actions and interactions with employees using reciprocal communication (Wu et al., 2015). In cross-cultural studies, scholars have found ethical leadership to be a common concern of managers in Asia, Europe, and the United States. Because of this commonality, researchers discovered ethical leadership provides positive outcomes in employee motivation, two-way communication, employee engagement, and leader effectiveness (Wu et al., 2015).

Engelbrecht, Heine, and Mahembe (2017) proposed a study on ethical leadership and its effect on trust and work engagement. Engelbrecht et al. covered various aspects of ethical leadership but cited the most important aspect is the discussion involving the implications for managers who want to increase the level of engagement in the business. Engelbrecht et al. suggested employee engagement will improve when ethical leadership

is displayed in the work environment. Moreover, Engelbrecht et al. concluded businesses must take accountability for confirming leaders to implement ethical practices. When this type of implementation occurs trust in the leader is established through the existence of morally based business operations and purpose.

Researchers have used various methods to demonstrate ethical leadership has a positive impact on employees' attitudes and contributions to the business (Ren & Chadee, 2017; Yang & Wei, 2017). Bedi, Alpaslan, and Green (2016) and Mitonga-Monga, Flotman, and Cilliers (2016) explored ethical leadership using the 10-item Ethical leadership scale (ELS) developed by Brown, Harrison, and Treviño (2005) to indicate the impact of ethical leadership on employee work results. ELS includes 10 factors that measure magnitudes of ethical leadership including honesty, equality, empathy and ethical standards (Brown et al., 2005). According to Brown et al., ethical leadership using the social learning aspect of ELS is to generate interest in ethical leadership as well as facilitate businesses in their efforts to encourage ethical conduct in the company.

The presence of unethical leadership in businesses has forced company leaders to explore ethical leadership to generate a positive culture and leader-employee trust relationship (Srivastava, 2016). Bavik, Lam, Shao, and Tang (2017) stated ethical leaders share knowledge and offer the employee opportunities to generate motivation essential to improving employee engagement. Researchers have revealed the outcomes of ethical leadership to assist a business to retain a positive culture of ethical leadership to improve employee engagement (Piccolo, Greenbaum, Den Hartog, & Folger, 2010), which may reduce unethical scandals in the company. According to Srivastava (2016), leaders who

abide by the fundamental values and ethical standards of the business can channel the attitudes of the employees towards increasing profitability and productivity, thereby creating an engaged workforce.

Ethical leaders influence employees through motivation; however, businesses are still encountering challenges of generating strategies to promote employee engagement (Engelbrecht et al., 2017). The leader who demonstrates an ethical style of leadership is prone to adopt an environment conducive to positive employee engagement. A positive environment can increase productivity as well as employee participation in the successful completion of the company's goals (Engelbrecht et al., 2017). According to Demirtas (2015), there is a strong demand for businesses to implement leaders with the characteristics of ethical leadership in both the private and public businesses.

Researchers have used MLT to help explain how leadership affects the relationship of employees to engage and generate a relationship of trust with their leader (Holmes, 2016; Madlock & Sexton, 2015; Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017). Leaders encourage subordinates to plan for future opportunities, which builds trust with employees (Farrell, 2016). When leaders inspire their subordinates, the employees become motivated to produce. Stressful and challenging times within a business can include budget reductions, layoffs, and closures (Farrell, 2016). In these situations, leaders might need to be factual and communicate both positive and negative situations effectively and with empathy.

The leader sets the environment in the business and leaders who create an environment of empowerment, transparency, trust, and engagement will create a culture

of employees who will begin to understand and welcome the engagement initiative (Farrell, 2016). Increasing engagement is a challenge and requires adjustments in business (Alonso & Mo, 2014). If business managers increase communication, decrease micromanaging, and empower employees, employee engagement may increase (Farrell, 2016).

Transition

Section 1 introduced a thorough review of the concepts and theories surrounding employee engagement retrieved from existing literature. The section also involved thoughts, arguments, and discussions on motivation, communication, and leadership. Additionally, summaries of the proposed methods of research, the conceptual framework, and the nature of the study were covered in Section 1. Section 2 provided a review of the purpose statement, the role of the researcher, the participants of the study, the research method and design, population sampling, data collection, data analysis technique, and assurances of reliability and validity. Section 3 included an overview of the study, a presentation of the findings, applications to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for further study, reflections, a summary, and a conclusion.

Section 2: The Project

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to explore the effective communication strategies that managers used to improve employee engagement and increase productivity as well as profitability. The target population comprised three managers operating in companies located in the northeastern region of the United States who have developed and implemented communication strategies to improve employee engagement and increase productivity as well as profitability. This study's implications for social impact include increasing sustainable engagement to increase productivity that bridges the engagement gap between managers and employees. When employees are engaged, business leaders can more effectively allocate their resources and invest in the community by providing employment opportunities to sustain, grow, and increase profitability.

Role of the Researcher

According to Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Khoshnava Fomani, Shoghi, and Ali Cheraghi (2014), the role of the researcher is to produce information that can contribute to knowledge of the phenomenon under study. Halcomb and Peters (2016) stated that maintaining an appropriate relationship with the participant or participants is an additional researcher role. I was the primary data collection instrument used to gain an understanding of the successful strategies managers use to improve employee engagement and increase productivity as well as profitability. In addition, I used other instruments to complete this study including electronic devices to retain the data.

In my role as the researcher, I identified my own assumptions and biases before initiating the data collection process. I do have some knowledge of the employee engagement phenomenon in the workplace, having observed direct employee engagement interactions in day-to-day work activities and having collaborated with management to encourage employee engagement to improve the manager-employee relationship. I will describe my professional experience to place the current study in the context of my personal history, competencies, and social values.

I work for the federal government as a first-line supervisor with some management training. I believe the social skills and values I have learned through my work experience enhanced my impartiality and understanding of the issues I explored. Understanding these issues enabled me to set aside my own bias while maintaining an openness to constructive criticism and opposing opinions. I conducted face-to-face interviews to collect data needed to answer the research question. According to Yin (2015), the interview is the most important source in case study research because it provides the researcher the opportunity for direct observations and interpretive schemes in communication. According to Suchan (2006), an individual's interpretive scheme shapes his or her thought process regarding a situation at a specific point in time.

The interpretive schemes allowed for in-depth answers to the interview questions and my in-depth observations. I noted all nonverbal observations throughout the interview process and used a Samsung Galaxy tablet to record the participants' verbal responses to the open-ended questions. I also used a Samsung Galaxy S8 cellular phone recorder to avoid loss of any pertinent information if the other device failed. As a novice

researcher, I familiarized myself with the possible challenges inherent in the qualitative research process. Sanjari et al. (2014) noted that ethical challenges include confidentiality, informed consent, and anonymity. In addition, as researcher, I identified and understood the compassion needed to reform the specific business problem and not replicate the process.

The relationship between me and the participants was neither personal nor business-related. I selected the participants based on reports from employees in a business operating in the northeastern region of the United States who believed their managers have successfully generated strategies to improve employee engagement in their business. Because I had no business or personal relationship with the participants or a working knowledge of the employee engagement problems occurring in the business, I was less likely to introduce bias into the research results, but I did nonetheless reflect on subjectivity. Hollenbeck (2015) noted that the novice researcher tends to associate subjectivity with bias. The use of subjectivity allows a researcher to reflect on some common points communicated in the interview process and respect the voice of the participant (Marek, 2016). However, if the researcher becomes subjective during the conversation and shows favoritism towards the employee or the manager, biased opinions could flourish, which could decrease the credibility of the data collection process. My lack of knowledge of the company's employee engagement initiatives helped me to mitigate bias.

The results presented in this study involve statements from human subjects. The Belmont Report (1979) lists ethical principles and guidelines for researchers using human

subjects to follow (Metcalf, 2016). Damianakis and Woodford (2012) and Yin (2015) both indicated that qualitative researchers are responsible for sustaining and fulfilling these ethical principles and guidelines. In this study, I used three ethical principles involving human subjects: beneficence, justice, and respect for persons (Cugini, 2015; Metcalf, 2016). Cugini (2015) and Metcalf (2016) reported that beneficence refers to the ethical obligation to maximize benefits and minimize harm. Justice describes the researcher's ethical obligation to treat each person (population) equitably and equally. Respect for persons incorporates two ethical considerations: respect for autonomy, and protection for persons with reduced autonomy.

Participants

Choosing participants using comprehensive principles results in a representative group of participants who add value to a study (Mao & Adria, 2013). I invited prospective participants who identified as having experience with the phenomenon under study. Yin (2015) stated that recruiting participants who have experience with the research phenomenon is required in case study research. I selected the participants from a population of seven managers using purposive sampling. The rationale for employing a purposive strategy is the assumption that certain categories of individuals may have unique, different, or important perspectives on the phenomenon under study (Robinson, 2014). The managers I selected implemented strategies to generate employee engagement to increase productivity and profitability. Selection criteria included those managers who have been employed for at least 5 years by a business operating in the northeastern region of the United States.

Gaining access to and building rapport with participants was critical in the research process (Nkansah & Chimbwanda, 2016). I contacted the prospective participants through telephone calls, personal contacts, emails, and letters to request their participation and explain my objectives for the study. I also explained the potential benefits of the study and informed potential participants that the reason I selected them was the knowledge or experience they had about the phenomenon. I also explained to the prospective participants that their stories and feedback may contribute to an effective understanding of successful strategies to improve employee engagement, which may increase productivity as well as profitability in the business.

The connection between the researcher and participants is essential to the quality of the research outcome (Algeo, 2013). To maintain a working relationship with the participants and ensure quality results, I established and retained a level of trust from conception to completion of the study by communicating with the participants prior to IRB granting permission to conduct the interviews. Trust is essential in human subject studies, and the presence of trust promotes positive researcher-participant interactions.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

Qualitative researchers aim to understand a certain facet of social life; the findings involve words, not numbers (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Qualitative research is naturalistic, and the methods for collecting data do not include the manipulation or alteration of human lives; reflection on self, others, and context is mandatory (Drisko, 2016). Qualitative researchers study subjective experiences through first-person reports

(Drisko, 2016). In addition, the use of the qualitative research method could assist in developing new understandings of phenomena from the perspective of participants. A unique perspective may lead to the discovery of information that could support the body of knowledge on a given topic (Stincelli & Baghurst, 2014).

To understand the participants' lives and lived experiences, it is necessary to conduct interviews, observe, and interact with the participants (Blakely & Moles, 2017; Brennan-Horley, Cridland, Phillipson, & Swaffer, 2016). A quantitative research method would not support such interactions. Quantitative research includes data collected from surveys and hypothesis testing using experiments or statistical procedures (Parylo, 2012). Quantitative researchers analyze numeric representations of the world using data from examinations and questionnaires (Yoshikawa, Weisner, Kalil, & Way, 2013). Mixed-methods research can involve the use of interviews and narratives, but I could not use this method because mixed methods also include a quantitative aspect. Johnson (2015) stated that the mixed-methods approach can be appropriate when multiple approaches are needed to understand a phenomenon.

The purpose of this study was to explore the insights of the participants, with a focus on understanding the strategies managers use to improve employee engagement. Researchers who use mixed-methods research to collect and analyze data amalgamate the findings using both qualitative and quantitative methods (Shannon-Baker, 2016). The focus of this study was not to examine relationships or test hypotheses, but to gain an understanding of the strategies managers who operate a business in the northeastern region of the United States use to generate a positive workforce through employee

engagement. Therefore, quantitative research and mixed methods research were not appropriate for this study. Instead, I relied on the qualitative method to collect and analyze nonnumeric representations of the world using interviews and observations (Yoshikawa et al., 2013). In qualitative research, the participants can express their experiences in their own words (Berger, 2015).

Research Design

I chose a descriptive single case study design for this research. Case study designs involve engaging various strategies of analysis as part of the qualitative design. A case study analysis involves investigation of an existing issue using data collected from various sources (Yin, 2015). In a case study, a researcher explores restricted systems via collection of data from many sources (Elman, Gerring, & Mahoney, 2016; Rule & John, 2015). A case study is suitable for studies in which the researcher's purpose is to explore individual issues in depth (Patton, Conway, & Stanley, 2006).

Researchers select a case study approach when they have some control over the process and wish to emphasize a real-life context (Yin, 2015). Yin acknowledged four different applications for case studies. The first is to clarify the connecting links in real-life interactions, which is more complicated when using the survey or experimental strategies. The second is to design a real-life situation in which interactions has happened. The third, a descriptive case study strategy, is a useful valuation instrument. Finally, researchers can use the case study strategy to explore circumstances to gain an insight regarding the phenomenon under study (Patton & Appelbaum, 2003).

The case study field is wide, and researchers have applied case studies in the psychology, sociology, business, and education arenas to gain holistic and real-world perspectives (Gog, 2015). The case study approach is not only a research design, it is also a research strategy that offers a structured approach (Yin, 2015). The case study design accounts for qualitative discrepancies, which involve data from individuals with extensive knowledge about the phenomenon in question (Mikkelsen, 2015). Yin (2015) noted that case study research has increased and contended that the future development of case study research can contribute to further knowledge. Researchers use a case study to explore strategic issues in a more personal and meaningful way to provide a deeper sense of meaning and purpose.

Qualitative case study research involves hearing the voice of the participants through their responses to open-ended questions, which can provide insight and understanding of the perspectives of the applicable population (Johnson, 2015). Other designs that fall under the qualitative research method are grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenology. Grounded theory supports exploring the aspects that depict leadership built on the experiences and perceptions of employees and managers (Stincelli & Baghurst, 2014). The focus of grounded theory is developing a new theory. The intent of this study was to explore strategic issues in a more personal and meaningful way, and the results may provide a deeper sense of meaning and understanding to business leaders encountering a lack of employee engagement. For these reasons, the grounded theory design was found inappropriate for this study.

Ethnography was not appropriate for this study, because the focus of ethnography is behavior, and ethnography describes the process and product of describing cultural behavior (Cruz & Higginbottom, 2013). Like narrative inquiry, ethnography involves providing truthful accounts of participants' stories and observations, as well as formal and informal interviews. Unlike case studies, ethnography involves collecting and analyzing documents such as policies and procedures to validate participants' observations and interview findings (Cruz & Higginbottom, 2013). These findings provide valuable information researchers can use to make sense of the business culture. Ethnography's focus on behavior is not applicable to the current study.

Although the phenomenological design is appropriate when a researcher aims to explore participants' understandings, opinions, and actions (Erford, 2014). The current study did not include such a focus. I did not intend to provide the stories of individuals; instead, the goal was to identify information to assist in building successful employee engagement strategies to increase productivity as well as profitability. This study was focused on the lives and lived experiences of individuals in businesses; there was no interest in shared experiences, commonalities, or shared meanings. The case study method involves using procedures and methods such as the portfolio analysis, Porter's five-force approach, value chain analysis, and other tools to resolve or compile a possible solution of considered cases (Gog, 2015). Thus, a qualitative descriptive single case study met the needs of this study.

According to Fusch and Ness (2015), qualitative research designs can encounter problems of data saturation in the interview process. Fusch and Ness, therefore,

recommended the researcher question the number of interviews needed to reach data saturation. One indicator of data saturation is when there is adequate data offered to reproduce the study (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012; Walker, 2012). A researcher's inability to reach data saturation can negatively impact the quality of the research (Kerr, Nixon, & Wild, 2010). To ensure saturation was reached I asked the participants the same interview questions. Bernard (2012) suggested asking multiple participants the same questions will enhance data saturation and increase the validity of the study results.

Data saturation is apparent in all designs of qualitative research for determining sample size (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Fusch and Ness (2015) stated it is not the number of participants or sample size that determines saturation, but the quality of the data as opposed to the quantity of the data. According to Constantinou, Georgiou, and Perdikogianni (2017), saturation indicates the obtained dataset has sufficient information for the qualitative researcher to address the research question effectively. McIntosh and Morse (2015) stated saturation is the collection of rich data within the interview process; however, data saturation is not reached until adding participants to the sample fails to contribute new information. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), data saturation transpires when no new information or new themes emerge. Reiteration of responses and common themes during the interview process will indicate data saturation for this qualitative study.

Population and Sampling

The study included a minimum of three managers who are currently employed in businesses located in the northeastern region of the United States. The participants were

from a population of seven individuals who provided their specific perspectives and experiences to answer the interview questions. Using purposive sampling allowed the proper selection of knowledgeable participants. Apostolopoulos and Liargovas (2016) indicated purposive sampling allows the researcher to consider the population when selecting the target participants. Each participant responded to the same set of questions and avoided biases from the eventual results (Ayogyam, 2014). The sample size for this study was three managers who work in businesses located in the northeastern region of the United States. The sample size is dependent upon what the researcher needs, what is at risk, what is valuable, and what will have reliability (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). Sampling includes more than just the participants involved in the study; sampling involves the participant, the researcher's contact with participants, and the length of each contact (Marshall et al., 2013).

A purposive technique was suitable for obtaining the current study sample. Purposive sampling maximizes the fulfillment of significant information related to the study (Shneerson & Gale, 2015). The purposively selected managers were required to work in a northeastern region of the United States business, have attempted to generate strategies to improve employee engagement, and have managed at least 10 employees for a minimum of 5 years. Five years' experience as a manager allowed the participants to contribute appropriate information in terms of relevance and depth. A purposive sample includes participants who have direct experience with a research phenomenon, which allows them to answer the research questions (Palinkas et al., 2015). Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016) performed a comparison study regarding convenience sampling and

purposive sampling. Etikan et al. revealed purposive sampling is appropriate for qualitative case studies because the purposive sampling technique is not used when the study variables are quantitative.

Marshall et al. (2013) researched sampling and data saturation and noted data saturation, originally used in grounded theory research, is applicable to qualitative research methods in which interviews are the primary source of data. Fusch and Ness (2015) noted the use of data saturation confirms the researchers have collected acceptable and valuable data to support a study; however, researchers cannot assume data saturation just because they have collected all data and exhausted the available resources. Marshall et al. (2013) recommended case study researchers use at least six sources of evidence to ensure data saturation. In contrast, Fusch and Ness (2015) noted the number of interviews for a qualitative study to reach data saturation is an unquantifiable number, but researchers should use what is accessible at the time.

The in-depth interview is a personal method of data collection. The researcher will ask open-ended questions to accumulate information exchanged between the researcher and the research participant (Zhang & Guttormsen, 2016) which could assist in generating strategies to resolve the phenomenon (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). I did not ask the participants to travel; rather, I made myself available at a time and environment suitable for the participant to conduct face-to-face interviews. Qualitative interviewing is a valuable technique to collect data from participants and involves rich, in-depth conversations (Marshall et al., 2013). The period slated for the interviews was 1 hour, but if a participant chose to share rich information, which may add value to the

study, the interview continued until the participants were satisfied with the information revealed.

Ethical Research

Before beginning the interview process, I sought permission from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and from the businesses operating in the northeastern region of the United States chose to participate in the study. After receiving permission from the IRB, I emailed an invitation requesting study participation to the selected participants. I created an email address specifically for communication between the participant and the researcher (employeeengagement2018@gmail.com). The introductory email contained the consent form with all the detailed information of the study, including their willingness to participate and their choice to remove themselves as a participant at any time (Appendix A). Participation in this study was voluntary.

As an incentive to participating in this study, the responses received from the interview questions could possibly enhance the employee engagement initiative in businesses located in the northeastern region of the United States, as well as businesses located in other regions. I provided a \$5 Walmart gift card to those who completed participation in this study. The participants could withdraw at any time for reasons unbeknownst to the researcher. A participant could withdraw from participating in the study by contacting me in person during the interview or by email or telephone. In addition, if any participant believed participating in this study would place them in an uncomfortable position after reviewing the interview questions, the participant had the option to withdraw from the study. I provided my contact information in the consent form

in the event a participant decides to withdraw or has questions prior to the interview (Appendix A).

Obtaining participants' informed consent was essential for protecting study participants' rights and for complying with the principles of ethical research. Leach, Kalinowski, Onwuegbuzie, Leach, and Benedict (2015) stated an informed consent is required when using human subjects in research studies. The information written on the consent form informed the participants of the confidentiality of their input. The fundamental aspects of ethical research required the confidentiality of consent forms (Fein & Kulik, 2011).

To ensure the interviews remained confidential, neither the participants' names nor the businesses name appears in the final study. I identified the companies as businesses operating in the northeastern region of the United States, and identified participants as M 1, 2, and 3. A thumb drive contained the secured information obtained from the participants. Secure information refers to the process of protecting the privacy of information (Silac & Back, 2014). The secure information will remain in my possession in a safe, secure place for 5 years. After the 5 years, I will destroy all information from the interviews, and any other pertinent information. The process of destroying all information involves shredding any paper documents and destroying all thumb drives containing any information related to this study. The final Doctoral Study includes the Walden IRB approval number.

Data Collection Instruments

The focus of this study explored the successful strategies managers used to improve employee engagement as it relates to the increase in productivity and profitability. The researcher is the primary data collection too; however, Yin (2015) acknowledged there are other sources used as data collection instruments in case study research. Qualitative data collection can consist of documents, direct observations, and interviews (Morgan, Pullon, Macdonald, McKinlay, & Gray, 2017). Yin (2015) stated documents should be the objective of data collection, direct observations create an opportunity for the researcher to view participants in their actual contexts, and interviews provide explanations as well as personal views.

Researchers, therefore, must carefully consider deploying the data collection instruments to maximize the opportunities for gathering data. The data collected for this descriptive case study will consist of direct observations of the participants, an electronic review of company records containing data on their employee engagement initiative, and semistructured face-to-face interviews. The interview process consisted of individual, semistructured face-to-face interviews. Face-to-face interviews are useful when researchers aim to explore the experiences or views of individuals in depth (Morgan et al., 2017). Researchers benefit from using semistructured interviews to foster environments that relay the ideas and meanings of the participants, thereby achieving a deeper understanding of the case under study (Mojtahed, Nunes, Martins, & Peng, 2014).

McIntosh and Morse (2015), who used semistructured interviews as their instrument, suggested the presence of a researcher as the interviewer provides structure to

the interview situation. A physically present researcher can observe any discomfort on the part of the respondent and offer a break or emotional support; hence, face-to-face interactions may be a more ethical way to conduct research (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). I began the semistructured interviews after receiving approval from the IRB and the businesses under study.

I opened the interview with a brief discussion of the purpose and intent of the study, explained the disclosure of information, and followed with a review of the consent form. The participant had the option to sign the form electronically or at the time of the initial interview because the invitation to participate was sent in an email. To create a positive interaction with the participants, I displayed empathy, social competence, and self-awareness. Collins and Cooper (2014) suggested using certain qualities in the interview process can enhance the relationship between the researcher and the participant. The participants participated in a semistructured face-to-face interviews to enhance the reliability and validity of the data collection instrument. I used member checking to ensure accuracy. Member checking ensures accuracy by allowing participants to validate the researcher's interpretation of the data (Tate, Hodkinson, & Sussman, 2017). Cooper and Hall (2014) used member checking in their research and suggested using member checking to validate the contents of interviews.

Data Collection Technique

The data collection technique process is an important aspect of research because it enables the researcher to offer answers to a variety of questions and encourage new questions concerning the phenomenon (Viles, 2016). Semistructured face-to-face

interviews with open-ended questions are a suitable way to understand the effects managers have on employees. The use of open-ended questions provided an insight into the participants' thoughts (Roberts et al., 2014). Open-ended questions do not suggest possible answers but allow participants to answer in their own way (Popping, 2015). Open-ended questions elicit rich accounts from participants' experiences at work or home (McGee & Pearman, 2014).

In qualitative research, researchers extensively use face-to-face, open-ended interview questions (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). There are advantages and disadvantages to this method of interviewing. An advantage of face-to-face interviews is the presence of the interviewer, which gives structure to the interview situation (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). In addition, face-to-face interviews allow the researcher to collect data on a wide spectrum of themes (Mahfoud, Ghandour, Ghandour, Mokdad, & Sibai, 2014). McCoy and Kerson (2006) revealed the disadvantages of face-to-face interviews include interruptions to the interview, emphasizing the importance of selecting an environment conducive to conducting the interviews.

The semistructured interviews created some consistency of focus while allowing the participants to guide the interviews. The focus of the interview questions was the managers' communication strategies used towards improving employee engagement. The design of the questions was to encourage the participants to focus on their individual experiences and feelings (Godwin & Schwabe, 2016). The open-ended questions produced a sense of cause and effect, which reflected the exploration of the manager-employee relationship in organizational trust.

After the IRB granted permission to commence the study, I began the interview process by scheduling the semistructured interviews at a time and place convenient for the participant and myself. The scheduled interview time was 60 minutes, depending on the extensiveness of the conversation. Rowley (2012) advised new researchers to aim for an interview period of at least 30 minutes in length, but also recommended allocating more time for eventualities such as the interviewee arriving late, interruptions, or other grounds to continue the interview beyond the scheduled time. During the interview process, I took notice of the nonverbal expressions of the participants and annotated any information pertinent to the research not captured in the audio recording. The information transcribed from the audio recording was validated through member checking. Member checking allowed the participants to validate the interpretation of the data confirming the recorded information was accurate (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016; Cooper & Hall, 2014).

Data Organization Technique

Qualitative research was an essential endeavor until Levin proposed a set of principles for data storage and retrieval using computer technology in 1985 (MacQueen & Milstein, 1999). Implementing computer technology simplified qualitative research, allowing researchers to store, retrieve, sort, and analyze information. I created a participant spreadsheet using Microsoft Excel to contain the names, dates, and other pertinent information related to the interviewees. This pertinent information included consent form receipt, identification codes, and completion of the interview process. A spreadsheet is a type of software that allows the modeling of many different processes

(Ose, 2016). I transferred the information from the Excel spreadsheet onto a thumb drive, and only I will have access to the information.

I used a password-protected Samsung Galaxy 6 tablet and a Samsung S8 cellular phone to record the interviews. I transcribed all audio recordings into a Microsoft Word document, removed the information from the computer, and placed it on a thumb drive to protect the company and the participants. Using Microsoft Excel to code and explore themes allowed me to conceal the identity of the research participants. All documentation, whether paper or electronic, will remain in my possession in a locked container for 5 years.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this study was to achieve an understanding of the communication strategies managers of businesses operating in the northeastern region of the United States used to improve employee engagement and increase productivity as well as profitability. The data analysis included using responses to open-ended interview questions. Qualitative researchers ask open-ended questions to explore meanings and collect data. Face-to-face interviews, direct observations, and documentation served as the sources of data for revealing the perspectives of managers in the current study. Data triangulation allowed the researcher to assemble data from multiple sources with a goal of corroborating the same results, e.g. documentation, direct observation, and interviews (Yin, 2015). According to Jentoft and Olsen (2017), data triangulation can disclose a social phenomenon's difficulty by offering a clear view. Data triangulation, along with the in-depth interview process, can improve data quality. Researchers use triangulation to

enhance the validity of a qualitative study (Kern, 2016). The focus of data analysis led to an understanding of the strategies managers used to improve employee engagement and increase productivity as well as profitability.

According to Yin (2015), using the appropriate form of analysis and multiple sources of data can assist in ensuring the accuracy of the study results. Yin's five-step process will assist in guiding the analysis of compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding the data retrieved from the various interviews, along with the use of the chosen business's website, publications, and articles. Yin (2015) stated when starting to analyze data, it is helpful to manipulate the data and search for patterns, insights, or concepts, which seem promising to assist in the substantiation of the data. The use of Microsoft Excel software assisted me in coding and identifying the themes for this study.

Data analysis is critical to the research process in increasing the validity and reliability of results (Bree & Gallagher, 2016). Using Microsoft Excel software allowed me to ensure the consistency of the data analysis process. Zhang, Huo, Zhou, and Xie (2010) used Microsoft Excel to analyze the concentration levels of drugs and revealed Microsoft excel is a quick, simple, and user-friendly tool in the data analysis process. Microsoft Excel was a resourceful tool to sort and structure qualitative data, resulting in a more thorough analysis of the data (Ose, 2016).

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

One means of demonstrating reliability is to annotate the decisions made in a research journal or diary (Grossoehme, 2014). I used the data triangulation method to ensure reliability. Using data triangulation allows the researcher to obtain data from multiple sources, reinforcing the reliability and credibility of the study (Jentoft & Olsen, 2017; Yin, 2015). My use of data triangulation confirmed the reliability of the data through a comparison of data retrieved from the various participants. McIntosh and Morse (2015) researched reliability in research and revealed dependability corresponds with reliability in a study and allows for the same outcome when other researchers explore the same phenomenon.

In addition, verifying the consistency of the findings can increase the dependability and reliability of a study and its results (Houghton et al., 2013) by exposing the various complexities of the phenomenon (Lu & Anderson-Cook, 2015). Explaining the procedures, understanding the role of the researcher, and selecting participants without bias enhances the reliability of the research results (Ali & Yusof, 2011). The data retrieved from the open-ended interview questions posed to the study participants was the primary data source for this case study. After the completion of transcription and documentation, the participants received a copy for member checking. Participants who positively interpret member-checked interviews experience an elevated level of comfort with the research process (Birt et al., 2016).

Validity

There are three criteria necessary to judge the validity of qualitative research: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, and (c) confirmability (Dasgupta, 2015; Houghton et al., 2013). Credibility is important in qualitative research (Appelman & Sundar, 2016). I demonstrated credibility through the presentation of the data and documents to the participants for review, referred to as member checking. Member checking provides the participants with the opportunity to address the researcher's interpreted data to add to or remove any misinterpreted data (Birt et al., 2016). McIntosh and Morse (2015) stated credibility in research occurs when the phenomenon under study is thoroughly represented.

Transferability occurred when an in-depth explanation of the background of the research is revealed, exposing valuable information transferable and comparable to other studies (Pompeii, 2015). Mandrik, Knies, Kalo, and Severens (2015) noted transferability refers to the setting of the research; other researchers who choose to apply or transfer the results of this study must use their own discretion in reporting the results in a different setting. Transferability allows the researcher to explore the reasons that determine whether the understanding gained from the research produces transferable knowledge (Collier & Wyr, 2016).

Confirmability refers to the researcher's ability to demonstrate the participants' responses and not the researcher's biases or viewpoints (Cope, 2014). Researchers performing qualitative research studies introduce their skills and knowledge, as well as their bias regarding the subject (Tong & Dew, 2016). Tong and Dew (2016) explored

confirmability in research and indicated researchers who use confirmability to validate the research results depend on the views of the participants, not the researcher's preferences. Confirmability is a portion of the developing research process which maintains the level of reliability and dependability (Eriksson, 2015).

According to Saunders et al. (2017), data saturation in qualitative research is reached when the collected data is analyzed, and no other data collection is necessary. I used the triangulation method to ensure sufficiency of data richness, which indicated data saturation. Using the triangulation method confirmed the reliability of the data by comparing the data retrieved from the various participants (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I used the participants selected through purposive sampling and incorporate enough information from the interviews that future researchers may reproduce the study. The skill of the interviewer clearly influences the quality of data collected and this will have a subsequent effect in achieving data saturation (Boddy & Croft, 2016; Palinkas et al., 2015).

Transition and Summary

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to understand the communications strategies managers use to improve employee engagement to increase productivity as well as profitability. Data collection involved audio-recorded semistructured interviews to explore the personal views of all participants. I used the data triangulation method to confirm data and ensure the data was complete. I chose the purposive sampling technique to select the participants. The justification for using a purposive strategy is researchers can assume various groups of individuals may have

exclusive, diverse, or significant perspectives on the phenomenon under study (Robinson, 2014).

Walden University's IRB granted permission to start the study once the requirements of the proposal and IRB application were met. I collected the data retrieved from the face-to-face recorded interviews and coded the information using Microsoft Excel. Researchers use coding to explore themes and reveal similarities or differences in meanings (Gheondea-Eladi, 2014). In Section 2, I discussed the purpose, the role of the researcher, prospective participants, research method and designs, population and sampling, ethical data collection and analysis, and the reliability and validity of the data collected. Section 3 concluded the study. This section included: (a) a presentation of the findings, (b) applications to professional practice, (c) implications for social change, (d) recommendations for action, and (e) recommendations for future research. Section 3 ends with reflections and conclusions, a summary of the significant views of Section 3, and an overview of the study.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to explore the communication strategies that managers used to improve employee engagement and increase productivity as well as profitability. I assembled and analyzed the data retrieved from the interviews, documents, and from the company's website. The findings revealed strategies that managers use to generate employee engagement and resulted in the emergence of two main themes: (a) creating a culture that encourages employee engagement, and (b) effective internal communication to increase employee engagement. In Section 3, I present the findings and discuss the applicability to the professional environment.

Presentation of the Findings

I conducted semistructured face-to-face interviews to understand the communication strategies managers used to improve employee engagement to increase productivity as well as profitability. All interviews were held at locations selected by the participant and lasted between 30 and 40 minutes. I transcribed each interview and interpreted the data. After all data was transcribed, I used member checking to ensure accuracy by allowing participants to validate my interpretations of the data. For member checking, I sent each participant, via email, a copy of the transcribed data to check for accuracy regarding the contents of the interview. Each participant validated that my interpretation of the transcribed data was a true representation of their responses. Yin (2015) suggested to create a conclusion from the transcribed data, researchers should

compile, disassemble, reassemble, and interpret the data to draw sound conclusions. Using conditional formatting in Microsoft Excel, I imported the data to analyze the findings. Once the analysis was completed, I disassembled the data retrieved from each participant, reassembled the data grouping similarities in data, which led to two main themes that I used to answer the research question.

The two themes that emerged were creating a culture that encourages employee engagement, and effective internal communication to increase employee engagement. The minor themes that developed from creating a culture that encourages employee engagement were (a) employee motivation; (b) retention and attracting top talent; and (c) barriers preventing employee engagement. The minor themes that developed from effective internal communication to increase employee engagement included (a) effective communication; (b) effective listening; (c) barriers preventing effective communication; and (d) communication to improve employee engagement to improve productivity.

MLT served as the conceptual framework for this study. According to Gronn (1983), the work of leaders in all organizations relies greatly on oral communication to achieve the responsibilities of both leadership and management to sustain an engaged workforce. Mayfield and Mayfield (2012) suggested that managers who use MLT combined with the three categories of utterances can promote a more efficient workforce, which can have a positive effect on employee engagement and on the business's productivity and profitability. Participant M1 suggested that communicating the employee engagement initiative in business is important and managers need to identify the lack of engagement problem and strategize a solution. M2 agreed and indicated the

managers' willingness to sustain a productive and profitable business was predicated on realizing an employee engagement problem exists in the business. M3 concurred and added that a manager cannot elude the employee engagement problem.

During the interview process, the participants' many responses indicated the need for business leaders to refer to the MLT as a useful resource when communicating the employee engagement strategy. I reviewed the findings to understand how participants created a culture that encourages employee engagement and effective internal communication. M1, M2, and M3 all suggested that employee engagement is a major factor in the success of a business. M2 stated that if leaders require employees to engage, then the leaders should lead by example.

Creating a Culture that Encourages Employee Engagement

Throughout the interview process, the participants shared similar ideas regarding successful strategies to create a culture that encourages employee engagement. M1 shared a view on creating a culturally engaged workforce and indicated the business encountered challenges because leaders desired to establish a culture focused on productivity that did not encourage engagement. According to Poulsen et al. (2014), leaders should develop and sustain a working environment to maintain a culture of employee engagement. The participant responses to Interview Question 4 provided the most data regarding creating a culture that encourages employee engagement. M1 suggested maintaining a continuous process improvement plan with employees to create and sustain a culture of effective employee engagement. M2 and M3 concurred and added that to have a culture of engaged employees, the business should develop a plan and include the employees in

some aspects of the planning; this will assist in building a positive culture of engaged employees.

Taneja et al. (2015) suggested it is imperative that business leaders focus on developing a culture of employee engagement. An engaged culture of employees can assist the organization in improving productivity and increasing profitability. When business managers apply strategies to develop a culture of engaged employees, they generate a connection between the employee, management, and the business (Payne, Cluff, Lang, Matson-Koffman, & Morgan-Lopez, 2018). Business leaders can build an effective culture of engaged employees when a predictable ritual for communication between leaders and employees is created to identify opportunities to improve the business culture (Sexton et. al., 2017).

Researchers have revealed when a business promotes a culture that enhances employee engagement, it enhances the employees' views and feelings, motivating them to commit and engage in their positions and the business (Vidyarthi et al., 2014). According to Sikora and Ferris (2014), to achieve a level of improved productivity and increased profitability, business leaders must focus on developing positive strategies that will improve the engagement process. M2 stated the managers focus is more high-level; therefore, the manager tends to forget to consider the impact decisions have on employees. M3 agreed and added when employees are included in some decision-making processes, it can generate trust between the leaders and the employees. M3 noted managers need to understand the importance of employee input since the employees are the ones who perform the day-to-day operations. When reviewing the theme creating a

culture that encourages employee engagement, I found three minor themes: employee motivation, retention and attracting top talent, and barriers preventing employee engagement.

Employee motivation. M1 stated that employee motivation is needed to effectively implement strategies to improve employee engagement. M3 reported that to motivate an employee, a manager must first change the employee's attitude about management. M2 stated meeting the employees' needs is what motivates them to engage in the business. However, Carton (2018) indicated providing employees with a charted course that connects their daily work with the goals of the organization will enhance the motivation level of the employee. All three participants were in the process of incorporating strategies to help motivate employees such as making changes in work processes, implementing more feasible business plans, investing in laptops which would provide employees the opportunity to work from home, and researching training courses that would meet the needs of the employees and benefit the business as well.

M2 stated that if employees are required to engage and show motivation toward the job and the business, then managers should lead by example. M1 discussed the monthly meetings held to keep employees informed of upcoming events or changes in the business. The meetings also include the presentation of awards, the announcements of promotions, and allowed for open discussions. M1 indicated, openly discussing non-work related issues presented the employees with the opportunity to become creative and share their ideas. M1 referred to this as "motivating employees to engage in the innovation of

the business.” Fischer and Montalbano (2014) indicated for an employee to continuously innovate, managers must continually generate strategies to motivate.

Retention and attracting top talent. When the participants responded to Interview Questions 1, 2, and 5, each discussed problems with retention. M1 discussed retention in detail, stating the business did suffer from retention issues. Feedback from employees who did not remain with the business cited issues such as lack of enjoyment in the position and person-job fit, which relates to the customs and values of the business and the principles of the employee (Ünal & Turgut, 2015). According to Afsar and Badir (2017), when individuals believe they are fit for the position, they approach the work with a positive attitude. However, in M1’s business, the environment was unappealing. Therefore, to appeal to the current employees and attract top talent, M1 developed strategies to improve employee engagement to positively impact retention. Training courses were developed for leaders on issues such as achieving leadership success through people, which instructed leaders how to be engaged with the employees. The employees were provided the opportunity to engage in personal development training courses. The training courses rendered a positive response from the employees and encouraged managers to research future training courses that would benefit the employees and the business, to help close the gap in the management/employee relationship.

M2 mentioned businesses use training courses as aids in helping individuals understand the business, others, and themselves. However, the individuals should have open minds towards management, changes, and the business for the training course to

have a positive effect. If a manager wants to retain current employees and attract top talent, it is a matter of recognition. Recognition leads to retention. According to Ansari and Bijalwan (2017), employees are the primary factors that define the quality and quantity of service, and to retain current employees and attract top talent, managers should promote an environment of effectiveness for the people. M3 agreed with M1 and M2 and added the northeastern region of the United States have competitive businesses that seeks to retain and attract top talent. M3's business offers various types of incentives such as performance awards, paid leave, and promotion. These incentives also helped to create an engaged workforce.

Barriers preventing the success of employee engagement. Participants' responses to all 6 interview questions revealed that barriers exist and have the potential to negatively affect employee engagement strategies. The findings solidified that while some strategies are successful, many are unsuccessful and managers need to recognize when barriers exist. Further, the findings showed that managers in the northeastern region of the United States businesses should gain a complete understanding of the factors that prevent employee engagement strategies from being effective. M3 revealed that one barrier to employee engagement is the resistance to change, and getting employees to buy-in to change is challenging. M3 suggested communicating the reason for the change and including employees in every aspect of the change could cause engagement throughout the business. M1 remarked that change is good and necessary in a business, but frequent leadership changes can hurt an employee engagement initiative. Clancy, Stroo, Schoenfisch, Dabrera, and Ostbye (2018) encouraged business managers not to

allow barriers to block progress because employee engagement is important in confirming sustainable results. If the barriers are not addressed, any efforts at developing an effective engagement process in the business will expire (Clancy et al., 2018). M1 indicated employee engagement is a change in process, but for this process to work effectively, there must be changes in the behaviors, attitudes, and practices of managers and employees.

M2 observed that the managers' inability to directly connect with employees is viewed as a barrier to engaging employees. Managers should conduct meetings to discuss the business accomplishments and present the productivity and profitability reports, which demonstrate a growth in business resulting from the hard work and dedication of the employees. This may indicate to the employees that the jobs they perform are meaningful to managers and the business. Decker, Mitchell, and Rabat-Torki (2016) stated when employees feel valued in a business and express their fears, accept constructive feedback, and participate creatively, the gap that caused the employee engagement barrier could be broken.

All participants understood their roles in generating strategies to improve employee engagement and possibly break the barriers to engagement; however, it is still the employee's prerogative to engage in the business. M1, M2, and M3 each indicated the disengaged employee can cause a barrier to the business strategy. Studies have demonstrated disengaged employees lower productivity, which can result in lower profitability for the business. According to a Gallup survey, 85% of employees worldwide are not actively engaged in their jobs. Low engagement is a concern for all

businesses. Gallup (2018) has shown that when employees are engaged in the business, they are 17% more productive and 21% more profitable than their peers in businesses with low engagement (Gallup Report, 2018).

Table 1

Frequency of Themes for Creating a Culture That Generates Employee Engagement

Theme	<i>n</i>	% of frequency of occurrence
Employee motivation	15	24.59%
Retention and attracting top talent	21	34.42%
Barriers affecting the culture of engagement	13	21.31%

Note: n = frequency

Effective Internal Communications to Increase Employee Engagement

Effective internal communication to increase employee engagement is the second major theme. Participant's responses to Interview Questions 2, 3, and 6 aided in revealing effective communication tactics to improve employee engagement. Strategies to generate effective communication can be a crucial element in a companies' success. Ayub et al. (2014) suggested when a leader communicates effectively, the manager-employee relationship will strengthen, which can allow the company to reach its goals. According to O'Neill et al. (2015), communication is an important driver of employee engagement because it connects the employee to the company by motivating and engaging the employees in the business. Furthermore, when internal communications are presented effectively in businesses it can assist in the growth of the business and improve communication and collaboration in the manager-employee relationship.

Effective communication, effective listening, barriers to preventing effective communications, and communication to improve productivity and increase profitability, were the minor themes representing effective internal communications to increase employee engagement. M1 suggested communication as art, because communication allows us to share emotionally and socially our feelings. An effective leader should understand how to and be prepared to interact on all levels with subordinates. Teaiwa and Huffer (2017) stated viewing communication as an art enables engagement for both the leader and the employee. M2 stated how a manager communicates with the employee can negatively or positively impact the employees' level of engagement in the organization. However, M1, M2, and M3, all agreed communications between a manager and employee are important; however, the style approach of the manager is different when it comes to communicating effectively. Therefore, business leaders should consider the importance of the effective communication in the manager-employee relationship to sustain a positive environment of employee engagement.

Mikkelson, York, and Arritola (2015) indicated the directives received regarding daily work processes are communicated through management and the technique the managers use to communicate is crucial to the productivity of the work process. Mikkelson et al. suggested occasionally, miscommunication can cause an employee to disconnect and not perform well. When Interview Question 2 was asked, M3 stated effective internal communication allows for a more efficient, effective, and productive workforce. Both M1 and M2 stated to have a culture of engaged employees, effective communication must exist, without it, there is no engagement. This sub-section of

effective internal communications to increase employee engagement validates the motivating language theory as a useful tool a manager can use to generate employee engagement. According to Mayfield and Mayfield (2016), the use of the MLT can assist managers to understand how effective and ineffective communication can affect employees motivation to engage.

Effective communication. The findings indicated to have success in building a culture that enhances employee engagement is to apply effective communication. M1 indicated employees often do not consider themselves as part of the business, therefore, it is necessary to communicate the importance of the role the employees has in the business. M2 revealed when a manager has an open-door policy and the employee is aware, it removes doubt, and breaks down the barriers of communication. M3 stated employees are the assets to the business and nothing could be accomplished without their loyalty to the job. However, if management does not communicate effectively, the positive impact the employee has on improving productivity as well as increasing profitability, the employee will not feel valued and become disengaged in the business.

Participant M1, M2, and M3 all agreed their businesses are working on strategies to create a culture that encourages employee engagement by using effective communication. This can lead to a more engaged workforce and an improvement in the business productivity and profitability. All participants are currently holding face-to-face meetings and company outings to expand the communication amongst managers and employees on a personal level. M1 shared that when you communicate on a personal level with your employees, you can empathize with the employee, which can create a

more comfortable working environment. M2 and M3 indicated collaboration on a more personal level helps to alleviate workplace tensions, thus, allowing the employee to become not only engaged in their jobs but engaged in the business as well.

For all businesses to encourage employee engagement, teams or individuals were assigned to lead the employee engagement initiative. Management allowed the employees to chart the course of the engagement process, with hopes of receiving the information from peer-to-peer would be accepted and any meeting regarding the encouragement of employee engagement would be well attended. M1 stated when employees positively respond to the improvements in employee engagement, it speaks volumes to the commitment of the employees and to the success of the effective implementation of the business plan. M2 shared when an employee holds a one-on-one conversation with the manager, it speaks volume to the employee engagement initiative and the communication strategies used to maintain a thriving organization. M3 agreed and responded by stating employees are committed to their jobs, however, including an employee engagement initiative in the business plan will assist in employee commitment to the business.

Effective Listening. Lombardo, (2016) stated by listening, you allow yourself the opportunity to retain information and to provide feedback in the communication exchange. M3 stated grumbling could always be heard in the workforce; however, Crumpton (2016) suggested leaders should listen and strategically invest in the source of grumbles because addressing grumbles could lead to assist in reinforcing the work culture. Crumpton also reveals listening to grumbles may help identify the needs of the

employees, but will not mitigate all problems or complaints. However, if grumbles are addressed in a timely manner, it will have a less effect on the cost of employee complaints. M2 concurred and discussed how grumbling could be heard after meetings. M1 stated not actively listening to the employees caused a disconnect in the business workflow and was a reason the business could not retain employees. M1, M2, and M3, all agreed they do not effectively listen to employees, but have come to understand effective listening helps to build a culture of engaged employees. Schmidt (2018) suggested not only effectively listen but to actively listen as well. Actively listening allows the receiver of the information to engage in the communication exchange. The LMX theory, which focuses on the leader-member exchange also contains certain aspects that relate to listening (Lloyd, Boer, Keller, J. W., & Voelpel, 2015). LMX requires that employees feel valued, respected, and supported by management, which is critical in the listening construct. The comparison in the LMX and listening is it can forecast that binding relationships will generate because of the interactions between the manager and the employee.

Barriers to prevent effective communication. Talib and Rahman (2017) defined a barrier as any condition that makes it difficult to make progress or to achieve an objective. Participants' responses to Interview Questions 3 and 6 revealed the existence of barriers, which may limit the effort to generate strategies to improve employee engagement. All participants reflected on the difficulty in attempting too effectively communicate with employees. M2 stated interacting with employees is difficult, and when the employee has a predisposition about the manager it places a gap in the

communication effort. M1 indicated the barriers as managerial problems. M1 also stated interpersonal business problems cannot be ignored, problems generate roadblocks, which negatively affect the business production and in time the profitability. M3 concluded to resolve any business problems that would hinder the effectiveness of communication, we must first admit there is a problem. Gruppen, Lamour, Mishra, and Jitendra (2017) acknowledged that transparency in communication will alleviate much of the miscommunications and problems that exist in businesses.

M3 noted managers and employees do not vocalize problems, in hopes the problems will dissipate. However, Madrid, Patterson, & Leiva (2015) acknowledged when managers and employees keep silent about the problems within the workforce it leads to hindering effects in the business. Chang, Chou, and Han (2018) researched silence in the workforce and indicated silence is a barrier that can prevent effective communication because when relevant information is withheld, it can cause a disruption in the workforce or the closure of the business. For example, many large corporations have fallen to corruption because leaders and employees alike, did not reveal relevant information. M1 stated understandably, there are many communication barriers, and the barriers become a challenge for the business.

M3 noted if we do not address challenges and barriers the business will not survive. Therefore, a business should thrive at creating an environment of transparency and openness for the employee. A manager's role is detailed and more high level, which can make it difficult to be aware of existing problems. M2 revealed the creation of the businesses open-door policy has begun to close the barrier between management and

employee. In addition, addressing barriers in business may require a new thought process for management.

Communication to improve productivity. Businesses will be faced with problems that will hinder productivity. All businesses strive for perfection, but because of various circumstances, the business could fall short of their goal. The employees are key to business success and if a business wants to survive in a competitive marketplace, management must identify areas that need improvement and implement necessary steps to assist employees to perform to the best of their abilities. To improve production through communication, managers must supply the employee with feedback, whether the feedback is negative or positive, the manager should inform the employee if he or she is making progress. According to Gruppen et al. (2017), feedback is important; however, if it is expressed in a negative manner it could negatively impact the employee's motivation to produce.

M1 stated once the employee engagement initiatives were effectively communicated, the employees were motivated to work, and this increased the productivity, which had a positive effect on profitability for the business. M2 specified when there is a problem with production, which may affect the profitability of the business, communicating with the employee regarding the problem has always resulted in a positive resolution. Effectively communicating with the employees to resolve production issues empowers the employee to speak candidly about the problem. M3 indicated the business relies on the employees for production; however, because of the business's inability to retain employees production has decreased, along with the profits.

M3 shared the lines of communication are crossed when it comes to directives. When a business has multiple managers not leading by example, then the business in time will fail.

Managers assist employees to achieve their goals as they work in the business environment; a manager should inspire employees to be open and willing to adapt to changes in processes and in the environment (Krishnaveni & Monica, 2016). According to Davila and Piña-Ramírez, (2014), management has a direct responsibility for the cause and effect of the business success. Management establishes values, culture, change, tolerance, and employee motivation, they shape business strategies through their implementation and efficacy. Successful managers have one commonality; they influence those around them to assist in maintaining a high level of productivity, which will generate a high profit (Olatunji, Ojelabi, Isiaq, Moshood, & Ewaoda, 2017).

Table 2 represents the minor themes that emerged from the analysis conducted on effective internal communications to increase employee engagement. The minor themes are (a) effective communication, (b) effective listening, (c) barriers to prevent effective communication, and (d) communication to improve productivity and increase profitability. The results support the research, which indicated internal communications in the workplace can directly impact employee engagement and the manager-employee relationship.

Table 2

Frequency of Themes for Effective Internal Communications to Increase Employee Engagement

<i>Theme</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>% of frequency of occurrence</i>
Effective communication	21	31.81%
Effective listening	15	22.72%
Barriers to prevent effective communication	13	19.69%
Communication to improve productivity and increase profitability	17	25.75%

Note: n = frequency.

Applications to Professional Practice

The finding of this study is significant to employee engagement practice and the manager-employee relationship. The primary objective of this study was to explore participants views concerning generating successful strategies to improve employee engagement. The results of this study could provide businesses with information to assist in strengthening business relationships not only with employees but business partners as well. Data from this research could add to prior and existing research regarding generating strategies to improve employee engagement. In addition, the findings of this study, are relevant to the motivating language theory and indicated business leaders who strategize and effectively communicate plans to improve employee engagement will generate a workforce of engaged employees. Mayfield and Mayfield (2016) stated using communication models such as MLT to assist in closing the gap between leaders and employees will motivate employees to engage in the business.

The first theme that emerged from this study consisted of creating a culture that encourages employee engagement. According to De Clercq, Bouckenoghe, Raja, and Matsyborska (2014), if managers direct their focus on the needs of the employees, they are less likely to create an environment of disengaged employees. Managers of businesses in the northeastern region of the United States and in other regions could use the strategies revealed within this study. The responses from the participants validated researchers theories on employee engagement to confirm the significance of creating a culture that encourages employee engagement.

The second theme exposed the need for effective communications to increase employee engagement. According to Reissner and Pagan (2013), managers can use both formal and informal means of communication to create an environment for employees to engage. However, if the employee reacts positively to the engagement initiative as it is communicated, the employee feels valued and respected as stakeholders in the business, which increases their propensity to engage with the organization. Managers in businesses could benefit from the information in this study based on the responses from the participants, which corresponds with previous and current research to understand that effective communications drive the course of the business longevity. Working towards generating an environment of engaged employees is not the sole responsibility of management; it requires the collaborative efforts of everyone in the business. The success of generating strategies to improve employee engagement is possible using effective internal communications.

This study offers saturated evidence from participants and previous and current literature on how a business can successfully generate strategies to improve employee engagement. In addition, an in-depth understanding of how the motivating language theory is a valuable tool to aid in the implementation of employee engagement programs. The data revealed in this study has implications for social change.

Implications for Social Change

This study has the potential to contribute to social change in businesses. Gallup report has revealed when employees are engaged in the business they are 17% more productive and 21% more profitable than that of businesses with low engagement (Gallup report, 2018). The participants of this study consisted of three managers in businesses located in the northeastern region of the United States who generated successful strategies to improve employee engagement. The intention of this study was to research successful strategies managers used to improve employee engagement and increase productivity as well as profitability within their businesses, which would allow a positive profit in a growing community. Saunders and Tiwari, (2014) indicated when businesses leaders generate a culture that encourages employee engagement, the production and profitability levels do increase. In addition, Mishra et al. (2015) indicated the engaged employee has the tendency to display a strong work ethic, involvement in the community, encourage family values, and have a positive impact on business and personal relationships.

To reap the benefits of an engaged workforce, managers in businesses must improve on the communication strategies used to invoke the desired culture. According

to Griffin, Bryant, and Koerber (2015), business managers should understand the methods that could possibly increase employee engagement in their business. Conversely, business managers should also identify those barriers that could hinder a positive result. The strategies used to successfully implement employee engagement discussed in this study can be incorporated into any business whose desire is to improve employee engagement.

Recommendations for Action

Researchers have viewed employee engagement as a long-term commitment between the employees and the business (Taneja et al., 2015). Taneja et.al indicated employee engagement is crucial to management, retention of current employees, and attracting top talent. Effective communication regarding the employee engagement initiative can result in improved interactions between the manager and the employee. Business managers should contemplate if the strategies revealed in this study reflect the mission of their business. Some business managers may not find the contents of this study valuable to their business; however, it is highly recommended that businesses communicate some type of employee engagement initiative in their business plan. All participants in this study have revealed the incorporation of strategies to generate employee engagement has had a positive impact on the productivity and profitability in their business. According to Gupta and Sharma (2016), the employee engagement initiative is widely recognized, and businesses are beginning to understand that implementing employee engagement strategies in the business can generate of positive

culture to engaged employees, which could lead to higher employee retention, increased productivity and profitability, and customer satisfaction.

Recommendations for Further Research

The results of this study support current and previous research studies regarding employee engagement. In this study, I explored successful employee engagement strategies that increased productivity as well as profitability. I recommend the novice or seasoned researchers explore further into successful employee engagement strategies since the limitations of this study involved only three participants who managed a business in one geographical area. The limitations of this study explored three managers in three business located in the northeastern region of the United States. I recommend for future research the exploration of employee engagement contains a larger sample size and a broader geographical area.

Reflections

Obtaining my doctor degree was never my goal. I only wanted to understand leadership to be an effective leader. However, it has always been my goal to become a writer, but situations and circumstance that have occurred overtime superseded my dreams. After receiving my master's degree, I still had the urge to do more. This experience was difficult and I can remember wanting to quit many times. However, I have never been a quitter; therefore quitting was not an option.

I do feel great about this accomplishment and when I reflect on my journey, I have been blessed! I had a knowledgeable committee that worked diligently to ensure I complete this journey, I have a phenomenal family that understood my pursuit for

excellence and I have a host of friends who always have encouraging words. I have no regrets about this journey. The process was long and tiresome; however, my journey was well worth the effort.

The purpose of this study was to explore successful strategies that managers used to improve employee engagement to increase productivity as well as profitability. I selected to research this initiative because I wanted to understand the manager and the effort it took to successfully initiate a process when employees are not willing to change. The most interesting part of this process is the knowledge gained through research and interactions with other doctoral students, my classmates were the best! In addition, the interview process was exciting. Each participant was passionate about the success of their employee engagement strategies and more excited to have received positive feedback from the employees.

I can definitely relate to the findings of this study because as a leader, I make a concerted effort daily to engage employees in my organization. The participants in this study did take different approaches to generate employee engagement strategies, but the outcome for all was successful. The outcome for me is also successful because I have gained knowledge of strategies to use to maintain employee engagement in my organization.

Conclusion

The purpose of the qualitative descriptive case study was to explore successful strategies managers used to improve employee engagement. When business managers are transparent in their communication with the employees, the development of an engaged

culture is generated. Employees are valuable to the business and how the manager communicates shapes the environment. Developing a business environment that foster effective communication to sustain employee engagement helps the business to encounter the benefits of increased productivity as well as profitability, increased employee retention, and the ability to attract top talent. Semistructured interviews were held to gain a better understanding of successful strategies managers used to improve employee engagement.

The data received from the interviews were triangulated, then validated through the member checking process. Two themes emerged from this study, (a) creating a culture that encourages employee engagement and (b) effective internal communication to increase employee engagement. The finding from this study revealed managers who apply effective communication and employee engagement strategies to increase productivity, as well as profitability, have the ability to develop a positive workforce, which can lead to a thriving business. In addition, the information revealed in this study defined and exemplified strategies, which allow managers through effective communication, to engage the employee and increase productivity as well as profitability.

When an employee's psychological workplace needs are met, it changes their behavior and the employee is more probable to remain and engage in the business and become more productive (Luthans, Youssef, Sweetman, & Harms, 2014). Therefore, researchers are recommending the manager use an autonomous regulation to improve employee engagement (Santos & Mayoral, 2018; Stynen, Forrier, & Sels, 2014). Santos and Mayoral (2018) stated autonomously motivated employees experience comfort,

contentment, vigor, and an increase in productivity. Managers can positively impact the state of the employee's behavior by instituting practices and policies that encourage engagement and open communication. The results of my research demonstrated how managers who strategize communication tactics to improve employee engagement in their business, experienced positive results from the employee; this helped to close the gap in the manager/employee relationship.

Research on employee engagement is increasing and Shuck, Nimon, and Zigarmi (2017) stated the past decade has revealed the growth of theories and studies in employee engagement; however, the importance of building successful strategies to improve employee engagement depicts a more substantial work environment, which will allow the business to thrive and retain employees, attract top talent, improve employee engagement, and increase productivity as well as profitability.

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