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Strategies to Improve Employee Engagement in the Hospitality Industry

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Abstract

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MBA, Touro University International, 2007

BS, Touro University International, 2004

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

More than 50% of the workforce in the United States is disengaged, costing U.S. organizations almost $355 billion annually. Engaged employees improve customer satisfaction, perform effectively, and are committed to organizational goals. Guided by Kahn’s personal engagement theory, the purpose of this multiple case study was to explore strategies business leaders in the hospitality industry used to improve employee engagement for increased productivity. A purposive sample of 1 business leader each from 6 organizations in South Korea shared their experiences with the phenomenon of employee engagement. Data were collected through face-to-face semistructured interviews and by reviewing company position descriptions and human resource policies. Yin’s data analysis method revealed prevalent themes of communication, recognition and rewards, and work environment. Leaders influence employee engagement through open communication, providing rewards or recognition as performance incentives, and creating a psychologically safe work environment. Implications of this study for social change include decreased physical and mental health costs for employees and organizations. Improving employee engagement in the hospitality industry can reduce absenteeism and increase organizational profitability, sustainability, and participation in community and social programs.

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Dedication

First, I have to thank God for placing the desire in me to go beyond what I thought I could. I thank Him for His Word and praise Him for opening doors for me that I never imagined.

To my sons, Ethan and Everette Portis, who pushed and encouraged me always to be my best, and to my mother, Mary Joyce Taylor-Talley, who challenged me to excel in everything. When she enrolled in Walden University to complete her PhD, she immediately challenged me to do the same and every week checked on my progress. To my siblings Cheneé, Iris, Orris, Olivia, and Orran – thank you for being you. You kept me motivated with your humor throughout this process.

To my extended family and friends, I can never thank you enough for your listening ear and encouraging me.

To my Doctoral Chair, Dr. Franz Gottleib. Thank you Dr. Mike. Your insight and sense of humor were truly valuable to me. I remember calling you in distress many times, only to have you point in the right direction with a sound voice of reason.

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Thank you to the participants of this study for your willingness to give your time and your honesty during the course of this research.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Disengaged employees adversely affect organizations (Coetzer, Bussin & Geldenhuys, 2017b). Prolonged employee disengagement can lead to burnout, absenteeism, and, ultimately, employee turnover (Shaukat, Yousaf, & Sanders, 2017). Furthermore, it is estimated that employee disengagement costs U.S. organizations almost $355 billion annually (Hollis, 2015). To address disengagement and implement reconciliatory strategies, leaders require specific knowledge and skills related to employee engagement and disengagement (Morgan & Bush, 2016).

Background of the Problem

Delivering frontline employee service is crucial to customer satisfaction and loyalty in the hospitality industry (Wirtz & Jerger, 2016). Frontline employees deal with challenging customer interactions and represent the organization to patrons through either face-to-face or voice-to-voice interactions (Karatepe & Karadas, 2015). Frontline employees should meet customers' needs while remaining positive in fast-paced industries (Solnet, Kralj, & Baum, 2015). Additional role stressors associated with the hospitality industry may affect job performance and satisfaction, and may lead to employee turnover (Karatepe & Karadas, 2015). High turnover rates affect organizational profits and create a disruption in operations, as leaders must recruit, select, and train employees to fill vacant positions (DiPietro & Bufquin, 2018).

Due to role stressors specific to the hospitality industry, employment within hospitality, over long periods of time, may lead to disengaged behavior. Disengaged behavior correlates to three organizational factors: (a) lack of employee-friendly policies,

(b) lack of concern for family or coworkers, and (c) lack of desired company benefits, such as a salary increase or bonus (Patnaik, Satpathy, & Das, 2015). Disengaged employees negatively affect organizational productivity and profitability (Sonnetag & Kühnel, 2016), but reconciling disengaged behavior may improve employee job performance and company profitability (Al Mehrzi & Singh, 2016). The goal of this doctoral study was to explore strategies hospitality industry leaders use to improve employee engagement.

Problem Statement

More than 50% of the U.S. workforce minimally performs assigned tasks, which indicates disengagement at work (Heymann, 2015). Disengaged employees cost U.S. organizations almost $355 billion annually (Hollis, 2015). The general business problem was that business leaders often are unable to engage employees, which results in a loss of business profitability. The specific business problem was that some business leaders lack strategies to improve employee engagement for increased productivity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies business leaders use to improve employee engagement for increased productivity. The target population was one business leader each from six organizations with at least 3 years of leadership experience in the hospitality industry, located in South Korea, who applied strategies with the intention to improve employee engagement to increase productivity. Engaged employees are good stewards and may support community service and volunteer programs (Voegtlin & Greenwood, 2016). The findings from this study contribute to positive social change through identifying strategies to improve employee engagement that may increase stewardship and support of organizational contribution programs.

Nature of the Study

The research method for this doctoral study was qualitative. Researchers use a qualitative methodology to interpret perceptions and experiences of participants as they experience phenomena (Flinkman & Salanterä, 2015; Gergen, Josselson, & Freeman, 2015; Rejno & Berg, 2015). The objective of qualitative research is to identify the perspective and experience each participant assigns to a problem (Phillips et al., 2015). In quantitative methodology, the researcher seeks to confirm causal or relationship linkages among variables through data analysis (Yardley & Bishop, 2015). I did not choose a quantitative method because the intent of this study was not to seek a causal relationship among variables. In mixed methodology, the researcher combines qualitative and quantitative approaches either sequentially or concurrently to strengthen the validity of results (McKim, 2015). The complex nature of a mixed methods design would yield results beyond the scope of this doctoral study. The qualitative method was most suitable for this doctoral study to elicit the perceptions of hospitality leaders and their experience with strategies to improve employee engagement.

Several designs are available to researchers using a qualitative method including ethnography, phenomenology, and case study (Farre, Bem, Heath, Shaw, & Cummins, 2016). Researchers use the ethnographic design when studying a specific cultural group over a predetermined period (Rashid, Caine, & Goez, 2015). As the goal of this research was to understand the participants' experiences and perceptions regarding strategies to improve employee engagement, the ethnographic design did not align with the goals of this research. The phenomenological approach is a viable approach to gather detailed information on participants' lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). However, researchers have primarily used the phenomenological approach to conduct interviews to collect data, which may fail to reveal the complex information required for a deeper understanding of the problem (Bowden & Galindo-Gonzalez, 2015; Landrum & Garza, 2015; Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, & Snelgrove, 2016). Due to this limitation, the phenomenology design was not suitable. A case study design is suitable when the goal is to focus on a contemporary phenomenon and when no clearly defined contextual boundaries exists for a phenomenon (Yin, 2009). Researchers employing the case study design can conduct interviews to collect data, but can also review audiovisual material, documents, and reports as a means to understand the phenomenon of study (Morgan, Pullon, Macdonald, McKinlay, & Gray, 2017). The case study design was the preferred approach for this doctoral study, as multiple data collection processes facilitated exploring managerial strategies in a variety of contexts surrounding employee engagement.

Research Question

The research question for this study was as follows: What strategies do leaders use to improve employee engagement for increased productivity?

Interview Questions

The interview questions for this study were as follows:

1. How does meaningful work influence employee engagement to increase productivity?
2. How does workplace safety influence employee engagement to increase productivity?
3. How does employee commitment influence employee engagement to increase productivity?
4. What strategies are effective to improve employee engagement that led to increased productivity?
5. How does employee engagement affect productivity in your organization?
6. What factors influence employee engagement to increase productivity?
7. How does leadership influence employee engagement in your organization?
8. What additional comments could you add to the study of improving employee engagement to increase productivity?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this doctoral study was Kahn's personal engagement theory. Kahn (1990) introduced the personal engagement theory to illustrate the degree to which employees are psychologically present while in the performance of their duties. Kahn (1990) noted that employees experience connections to work and coworkers physically, cognitively, emotionally, and mentally (Chen & Huang, 2016). Kahn indicated that people ask three questions prior to deciding to engage in work personally: (a) How much meaning will I gain to commit to this task? (b) Is it safe to do so? and (c) Am I available to commit (Kahn, 1990; Keating & Heslin, 2015)? Kahn

(1992) advanced his research on engagement and posited that employees exhibiting psychological presence fully immerse themselves to accomplish work tasks. Psychologically present employees are attentive to assigned tasks and have a connection with other employees within an organization, which fosters positive outcomes (Ramsey et al., 2015).

Expounding on Kahn's engagement conceptual framework, Macey and Schneider (2008) proposed employee engagement as a multifaceted concept founded on three types of engagement: trait engagement, state engagement, and behavioral engagement. The researchers referred to behavioral engagement as *extrarole behavior*. Extrarole behavior includes desirable characteristics, such as proactivity, tacit knowledge sharing, adaptability, and creativity (Demerouti, Bakker, & Gevers, 2015; Eldor & Harpaz, 2016). Each construct that builds on the previous construct leads to an employee's complete engagement and commitment to accomplishing assigned tasks (Demerouti et al., 2015).

Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Roma, and Bakker (2002) defined employee engagement as a motivational concept characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Schaufeli et al. contended that employee engagement is a continuous state in which employees not only focus on a specific task, but display vigor and have full engagement in work at all times. Unlocking potential, exertion, fairness, and performance are the driving forces to employee performance and are relevant to understanding how to improve employee engagement (Van Wingerden & Van der Stoep, 2018). As employee engagement is outcome based, the conceptual framework of personal engagement was appropriate to studying strategies leaders use to improve employee engagement for increased productivity.

Operational Definitions

The definitions of terms used throughout this doctoral study were as follows:

Absorption: Absorption is the level of concentration exhibited by an employee and the level of difficulty detaching from a task (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016).

Behavioral engagement: Behavioral engagement is supportive behavior employees exhibit that is not part of their daily duties (Banihani & Syed, 2016).

Dedication: Dedication refers to the degree of commitment to a particular task and the way employees experience self-worth, enthusiasm, inspiration, and pride while performing work (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016).

Employee engagement: Employee engagement is the behavior in which employees exhibit an emotional connection to organizational success (Saks & Gruman, 2014).

State engagement: State engagement refers to the level at which employees feel engaged while at work (Fletcher, Bailey, & Gilman, 2018).

Trait engagement: Trait engagement is the positive view employees have concerning work and fellow coworkers (Bakker, Vergel, & Kuntze, 2015).

Vigor: The level of increased energy exhibited by an employee, and the employee's willingness to invest in tasks (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Several underlying assumptions framed this qualitative doctoral study. Assumptions in research indicate certain inferences or preconceptions concerning a phenomenon (Mazzocchi, 2015). The first assumption was the participants in this study would have significant leadership experience and competencies to evaluate employee engagement. The second assumption was that the leaders participating in this study would answer the questions to the best of their knowledge and experience. Establishing conditional participation requirements for years of experience and ensuring confidentially in acquiring data mitigated the assumptions in this study.

Limitations

Limitations are uncontrollable weaknesses affecting research validity (Uri, 2015). How leaders perceived their experience limited the scope of this study. Some leaders may believe their leader behavior style is effective. In contrast, an employee may consider the leader’s behavioral style ineffective and ambiguous (Barling & Frone, 2017). Failure to address this difference in opinion may lead to disengaged employee behavior (Barling & Frone, 2017). A second limitation was a majority of hospitality firms operate 24 hours a day, and leaders could have been unavailable to participate due to work schedules, which might have limited the ability to obtain a full range of perspectives. Noncomprehensive data may skew findings. Finally, the difference in participant leadership experience may limit a complete understanding of the phenomenon of employee engagement (Nasomboon, 2014; Wilson, 2015).

Delimitations

Delimitations narrow the scope and define the boundaries of research (Moore, McKee, & McCoughlin, 2015; Rosenberg & Koehler, 2015). The participants in this study were managers in the hospitality industry, and managers in other industries might have different experiences and management cultures. Interviewing participants with strategies to improve employee engagement as opposed to those leaders who have not addressed employee engagement ensured responses provided purposeful data. Another delimitation was the exclusion of leaders with less than 3 years' experience, which increased the probability that the findings were more credible as participants with longevity may have greater experience with strategies to improve employee engagement.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

Disengaged employees may have adverse consequences for organizations (Ford, Myrden, & Kelloway, 2016). Understanding strategies to improve employee engagement may decrease instances of employee absenteeism and tardiness to improve work outcomes (Fida et al., 2015). The results of this study may assist the business community by providing information on strategies to improve employee engagement. Leaders supervising engaged employees experience positive outcomes such as better job performance and increased organizational commitment (Shantz, Aflfes, & Latham, 2016). Engaged employees provide better customer service, thereby increasing customer satisfaction and loyalty (Bowen, 2016; So, King, Sparks, & Wang, 2016). Engaged employees may increase organizational profitability and growth by improving customer satisfaction (Farndale & Murrer, 2015; Osborne & Hammond, 2017).

Implications for Social Change

This study may contribute to promoting social change by emphasizing strategies business leaders use to improve employee engagement for increased productivity, Breevaart, Bakker, Demerouti, and Derks (2016) posited that leaders increase employee work engagement by inspiring vigor and commitment to the organization. Engaged employees experience job satisfaction, which leads to improved mental and physical health while fostering goodwill among coworkers, customers, and members within the community (Kanten & Yesiltas, 2015; Upadyaya, Vartiainen, & Salmela-Aro, 2016). Engaged employees exhibit cognitive and physical health while demonstrating motivation and organizational commitment (Conway, Fu, Monks, Alfes, & Bailey, 2015). Engaged employees display organizational commitment by lending their talents external to the organization. Engaged employees use skills and business acumen to support corporate charitable efforts that benefit the community, such as after-school programs, disaster relief, or Habitat for Humanity housing (Gill, 2015). Employees and management share a common interest in the sustainability of the organization while contributing to the community through donations and community service programs (Lasen, Tomas, & Hill, 2015; Supanti, Butcher, & Fredline, 2015). The implications for positive social change are the improved relationships with other organizations and customers in the community.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies business leaders use to improve employee engagement for increased productivity. Disengaged employee behavior may affect the profitability of an organization. Leaders who successfully address disengaged behavior develop engaged employees who support the vision of an organization (Morton, Michaelides, Roca, & Wagner, 2018).

The aim of a literature review is to present a critical analysis and synthesis of the phenomenon under study (Veletsianos & Shepherdson, 2016). Due to the nature of this multiple case study, the target population was leaders in the hospitality industry working in South Korea. The leaders participating in this study had at least 3 years' experience and had applied strategies to improve employee engagement to increase productivity.

The literature review is a synthesis of past and contemporary research on employee engagement. The organization of the literature review is thematic. I used databases such as ProQuest and EBSCOhost to research the phenomenon of employee engagement. To further understand employee engagement, the following keywords served as guides: *business environment transitions, employee engagement, job performance, job satisfaction, leadership, organizational change, productivity,* and *workplace culture.* I conducted an Ulrich search of all sources to help determine which articles were peer reviewed and selected articles published between 2015 and 2019. Several major themes emerged from published literature on employee engagement, including leadership and leadership behaviors, social learning theory, and organizational factors. Of the 440 journal articles cited in this doctoral study, 374 are peer-reviewed sources published between 2015 and 2019 and representing 85% of the literature reviewed (see Table 1).

Table 1

Sources for Literature Review

Category	Books	Peer reviewed 2015–2019	Non-peer reviewed	Total
Books	8	N/A	N/A	8
Journal articles	N/A	374	58	432
Total	8	374	58	440

Employee Engagement

Kahn (1990) described employee engagement as motivating employees to perform their duties in support of organizational goals. Engaged employees exhibit high levels of energy and are engaged physically, cognitively, and emotionally in the workplace (Conway et al., 2015). Engaged employees consider their job expectations met and create physical, cognitive, and emotional attachments to their assigned job task.

Physical ownership. Engaged employees perform the physical aspects of their job duties and take ownership of those responsibilities. When engaged, employees can work through physical exhaustion and can recover quickly to meet job objectives (Mathisen & Bergh, 2016). Engaged employees, despite work demands, have fewer missed days from work and are less likely to become defensive or withdraw from work (Magee, Gordon, Robinson, Caputi, & Oades, 2017). Despite sustained physical work demands, engaged employees are committed to meeting organizational goals (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Thus, a disengaged employee may be more physically exhausted and unable to recover potentially leading to greater absenteeism and a lack in the ability to effectively represent their organization.

Cognitive ownership. The cognitive element of engagement is the importance employees place on their job and has two factors: absorption and attention (Joo, Zigarmi, Nimon, & Shuck, 2017). Employees absorbed in their job objectives are focused and not easily distracted. Engaged employees are attentive to their job objectives and are often absorbed and focused throughout the day. Not only is an employee physically present for work but the job objectives are fulfilling, and an employee’s work experience is positive (Joo et al., 2017). Rather than mentally detaching from job objectives, engaged employees choose to invest in performing their duties to their full capability and take pride in their work.

Cognitive ownership begins at the individual level for an employee and occurs when employees find meaning in their work and believe their conceived return on investment in the organization exceeds expectations (Dawkins, Tian, Newman, & Martin, 2017; Joo et al., 2017). Leadership engagement may be the catalyst for employee engagement. Managers valuing the roles of emotional connectivity, equality, and respect foster employee engagement in the work environment to improve employee engagement (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016). Leaders who provide opportunities for employees to communicate issues or provide input on processes promote employee engagement and commitment. Leaders are a significant part of employee engagement. Without effective leadership, employees’ commitment and motivation may diffuse.

Emotional ownership. Creating emotional attachment for employees requires managers to develop a relationship of trust (Ng, 2016). Interpersonal relationships formed within the workplace are crucial to employee engagement and play a significant role in instilling commitment to the organization (Carasco-Saul, Kim, & Kim, 2015; Mustafa, Martin, & Hughes, 2016). Employees exercising the same values within the workplace create a sense of ownership within the organization (Hu, Schaufeli, & Taris, 2016). Engaged employees perform consistently, despite job stressors such as increased job expectations or decreased job security. Emotional ownership motivates engaged employees to incorporate organizational goals into personal work goals.

Psychological conditions. Kahn (1990) introduced three psychological conditions as influences to work engagement: meaningfulness, safety, and availability. Whereas psychological meaningfulness refers to the return on investment an employee may feel, psychological safety means working without fear of negative consequences to an individual’s self-image (Agarwal & Farndale, 2017). The last condition, availability, refers to the capacity to engage in work personally by drawing on physical, emotional, and psychological resources (Banihani & Syed, 2016). The conditions of meaningfulness, safety, and availability constitute how employees view their roles within the organization and execute their daily responsibilities.

Gender is one factor that may influence how psychological conditions impact individual’s engagement in their employment. Researchers posit societal values may target male engagement over female engagement in the workplace (Glass & Cook, 2016).

Employee engagement may be gendered when tasks are easier for men to engage physically, cognitively, or emotionally, as compared to women (Banihani & Syed, 2016). Society views women as less influential and sometimes incompetent in male-dominated workplaces (Banihani & Syed, 2016). Many women in positions of authority within organizations may feel the need to emulate male qualities to succeed, and some individuals view them as harsh and unapproachable. Others in an organization may view women holding high positions within the organizations as tokens and may not respect women in positions of authority. Due to this gendering of certain workplaces, women in organizations may have less opportunity to hone and express the psychological conditions required to improve engagement (Glass & Cook, 2016).

Kahn (1992) further described employee engagement as the level of psychological presence exhibited by an employee while at work (Ramsey et al., 2015). Employees identifying with the work environment on an interpersonal level create a job identity, and monetary awards are not a motivating factor (Mustafa et al., 2016). Engaged employees believe their actions add value to the organization. Engaged employees understand organizational leaders structure job objectives according to ability. These employees take ownership and interest in the outcome of their assigned job tasks. As employees exhibit consistent ownership of tasks, the task complexity stimulates professional development and employee engagement (Schaufeli, 2015).

Macey and Schneider (2008) posited employees display work engagement through trait, state, and behavioral engagement (Banihani & Syed, 2016). Employees display trait engagement by presenting a positive outlook at work (Banihani & Syed, 2016). Trait engaged employees may remain optimistic through challenges at work and maintain their disposition through stressful situations. Trait-engaged employees are usually proactive and conscientious. State engagement refers to feelings such as commitment, autonomy, and empowerment (Banihani & Syed, 2016). Employees experiencing autonomy and empowerment in the work environment have higher levels of engagement (Osborne & Hammond, 2017). Employees exhibiting state engagement often feel satisfied at work. Extrarole behavior is a factor of behavioral engagement (Banihani & Syed, 2016). Employees exhibit extrarole behavior through organizational citizenship behavior and may perform duties beyond the scope of their position description.

Employees experience inhibitors to engagement (Byrne, Albert, Manning, & Desir, 2017). Employees diagnosed with mental disorders, such as depression, may be less likely to exhibit trait behavior in the performance of their daily duties. Overwhelmed employees experience feelings of inadequacy and depleted energy, thereby inhibiting the display of state engagement. Micromanaging leaders may prevent employees from displaying behavioral engagement. Employees without autonomy fail to exhibit extrarole behavior. Leaders failing to identify one of or all the inhibitors to employee engagement may negatively affect employee productivity (Srivastava & Dhar, 2016).

Organizational leaders view employee engagement as creating employee satisfaction to increase productivity (Ismail, Iqbal & Nasr, 2019). Managers who effectively communicate organizational goals improve employees' emotional well-being and motivation in the work environment (Ng, 2016; Walther, Möltner, & Morner, 2017). In addition to communication, respect for employee ideas improves emotional ownership

(Hu et al., 2016). Engaged employees establish emotional ownership of assigned tasks, feel satisfied, are productive, and have a positive effect on organizational profits (Ahmetoglu, Harding, Akhtar, & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2015).

Leaders who form a partnership with employees increase job satisfaction and employee autonomy to accomplish tasks. Psychological ownership and the transformational leadership style may assist in improving employee decision-making and increase employee involvement (Kim & Beehr, 2017; Xiong & Fang, 2014). Transformational leaders increase employee motivation to improve employees' emotional investment (Ng, 2016). Motivated employees demonstrate emotional commitment to the organization and achieve organizational goals.

Employees exhibiting an emotional commitment are stewards within the organization and exhibit organizational citizenship behavior. Stewards within the organization take responsibility for tasks and display commitment to the organization. Engaged employees demonstrate stewardship within the organization (Coetzer, Bussin, & Geldenhuys, 2017a). The level of engagement displayed indicates the level of emotional commitment an employee has to an organization (McNulty & Nordberg, 2015).

Engaged employees create emotional attachments to their role responsibilities within the work environment. Engaged employees emotionally invest in the success of the organization and seek opportunities to improve customer loyalty (Bulkapuram, Wundavalli, & Avula, 2015; Peng & Pierce, 2015). Employees developing an emotional attachment or psychological capital have a positive effect on overall behavior within the organization. Emotional investment increases employee productivity, customer loyalty, and organizational profitability (Jeve, Oppenheimer, & Konje, 2015).

Continued work under increased stressors may decrease an employee’s performance and erode trust. Anxiety created by uncertainty may hinder an employee’s performance (Roskes, 2015). Unaddressed employee deviance may affect organizational commitment or emotional ownership of assigned tasks (Guay et al., 2016). Managers must recognize the decline in an employee’s performance and intervene by addressing factors interfering with job performance (Bailey, Madden, Alfes, & Fletcher, 2017; Carasco-Saul et al., 2015). Strong leadership decreases the likelihood of disengagement by fostering a work environment where employees have resources to complete job requirements free of psychological stress (Choi, Tran, & Park, 2015; Lee & Ok, 2015).

Employee Development

Employee development is a factor in engagement. Leaders have a responsibility to identify areas of development to improve performance and include employees in the development of training plans to influence and improve performance (Guery, 2015). Leaders failing to provide opportunities for employee development may affect employees’ level of engagement in the workplace (Armstrong, Shakespeare-Finch, & Shochet, 2016). Employees exhibiting ownership in the work environment are trained on their tasks and understand individual job expectations. Employees who take ownership of their individual tasks have high service quality standards and improve customer satisfaction (Li, Wong, & Kim, 2016).

Employees have higher engagement levels when career development is a priority within an organization (Taneja, Sewell, & Odom, 2015). Leaders have a responsibility to develop employees and to encourage employees to compete for growth opportunities (Panaccio, Henderson, Liden, Wayne, & Cao, 2015). Mentorship is the process by which a more experienced person guides or assists employees in areas of expertise (Madan & Srivastava, 2017; Qian, Lin, Han, Chen, & Hays, 2014). Mentorship can be either formal or informal; however, the mentor must exercise candor and equality among mentees and must develop a trust relationship to maximize employee potential (Madan & Srivastava, 2017; Qian et al., 2014). Organizations with an emphasis on mentorship experience increased profitability and higher retention rates of employees (Madan & Srivastava, 2017; Neupane, 2015).

Engaged employees strive to meet customer expectations. Engaged employees provide high service quality and create customer loyalty and satisfaction (Hussain, Al Nasser, & Hussain, 2015). Employees receiving additional training opportunities improves work engagement and work performance and increases customer satisfaction (Nielsen & Jørgensen, 2016). Employee engagement improves customer satisfaction and organizational profitability.

Engagement Factors

Employees respond to leaders who include them in setting individual goals and explain job expectations to increase engagement and productivity (Choi et al., 2015). Employee recognition is a factor of employee engagement (Choi et al., 2015). A simple thank you from leader to employees may provide employees with a sense of contributing to organizational goals (Singh, 2016). Open communication is crucial to establishing a mutual partnership between the leader and an employee to foster employee engagement (Bin, 2015).

Employee self-esteem is a factor of employee engagement. Employees with low self-esteem may not engage in the work environment. Employees exposed to unfair work practices or tyrannical leadership may experience low self-esteem (Ouyang, Sang, Li, & Peng, 2015). Whether unfair behavior in the work environment is real or perceived, there is an effect on employee morale and employee engagement (Ouyang et al., 2015).

In contrast, employees with high self-esteem have increased organizational commitment and engagement (Keller, Meier, Gross, & Semmer, 2015). High self-esteem has a direct correlation to engagement and organizational citizenship behavior. Employees with high self-esteem operate with self-efficacy, require minimal supervision, and exhibit satisfaction within the work environment (Keller et al., 2015).

Engaged employees have a commitment to the organization and employ innovative processes to decrease costs associated with services (Kaliannan & Adjovu, 2015). Engaged employees seek to improve work processes to increase proficiency and efficiency (Lee & Ok, 2015; Lu, Lu, Gursoy, & Neale, 2016). Leaders play a crucial role in fostering an environment where employees have the resources required to accomplish individual tasks and are treated fairly, which leads to increased job satisfaction and inspiration to improve processes.

Employee motivation is an element of engagement. A correlation exists between employee satisfaction and improved motivation (Barros, Costello, Beaman, & Westover, 2015). Satisfied employees feel motivated and seek opportunities to improve customer experience with the organization. Increased customer loyalty equates to profitability and sustainability of an organization. Leaders who provide training opportunities may improve employee motivation and increase job satisfaction (Idris, Dollard, & Tuckey, 2015).

Employees exhibit increased motivation when they believe leadership is genuinely concerned with improving their performance (Gottfredson & Aguinis, 2017; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). Leaders who effectively manage talent increase engagement, motivation, and trust within employees (Deery & Jago, 2015; Pulakos, Hanson, Arad, & Moye, 2015; Sheehan, Grant, & Garavan, 2018). When leaders understand performance objectives and are aware of employee performance limitations, the leaders set goals, manage expectations, and develop training plans to improve performance (Pulakos et al., 2015). Leaders also take opportunities to recognize employee performance improvement. Managing organizational expectations and the expectations of an employee provides additional opportunities to improve employee motivation and engagement (West & Blackman, 2015).

Employees view performance appraisals as an asset in identifying strengths and areas requiring improvement in the supervising process. Performance evaluations have a direct influence on employee engagement (McDaniel, Ngaia, & Leonard, 2015). Engaged employees have a desire to know what objectives they perform well and those objectives requiring training and improvement (Yoerger, Crowe, & Allen, 2015). Leaders improve employee engagement through setting achievable objectives for employees and frequent performance evaluations (McDaniel et al., 2015). Leaders improve employee engagement, employee expectations, and organizational commitment (Carasco-Saul et al., 2015; Katou, 2015).

A link exists between improved engagement and employee satisfaction in the work environment, which directly improves customer satisfaction (Cahill, McNamara, Pitt-Catsouphes, & Valcour, 2015; Kumar & Pansari, 2015). Engaged employees increase customer loyalty by creating positive emotional experiences the customers seek to recreate through frequent visits (McDaniel et al., 2015). Engaged employees understand the links customers seek to create through positive emotional attachments to an experience and to facilitate that attachment.

Employee engagement increases when the work environment creates positive daily experiences, when job characteristics are fulfilling, and when leaders exhibit support (Jeve et al., 2015). Engaged employees consistently achieve organizational and customer expectations (Armstrong et al., 2016; Osborne & Hammond, 2017). Employees exhibiting a high level of engagement in the work environment increase the quality of service experienced by customers, which has a direct influence on customer satisfaction (Roof, 2015). Organizational performance improves with employee engagement (Bulkapuram et al., 2015).

Engagement Outcomes

Leadership behaviors influence employee engagement. Leaders who create an environment of trust assist in improving employee motivation (Okello & Gilson, 2015). On the contrary, leaders creating dissatisfaction in the workplace affect employee engagement. Dissatisfied employees are less productive and exhibit poor customer service skills (Congregado, Iglesias, Millán, & Román, 2016). Engaged employees feel satisfied and enthusiastic about work (Blattner & Walter, 2015). Engaged employees are productive and satisfied with the work environment (Bowen, 2016). Leaders fostering a positive work environment increase employee engagement for increased productivity.

Job requirements and demands affect employee engagement (Bailey et al., 2017). Increased job demands increase employee stress. Longer work hours without increased benefits erode the trust relationship between an employee and a leader (Shuck & Reio, 2014). Leaders within an organization should mitigate stressors in the workplace to maintain employee satisfaction and accomplish organizational goals (Bailey et al., 2017).

Organizational outcomes improve with employee engagement (Albrecht, Bakker, Gruman, Macey, & Saks, 2015). Leaders foster an engaged work environment through open communication with employees (Nasomboon, 2014). Leaders must also identify and address factors of employee engagement, such as adaptability and social skills, to improve employee engagement (Albrecht et al., 2015; Shuck, Zigarmi, & Owen, 2015). Moreover, established role importance improves employee engagement. Leaders providing employees with empowerment, value, and individual development improve employee engagement (Jose & Mamphilly, 2015; Kim & Beehr, 2017). Employees understanding strategic organizational goals exhibit innovative behavior to support those goals (Jose & Mamphilly, 2015).

Expectancy Theory

Employees strive to meet organizational goals when organizations meet employee expectations. Vroom (1964) noted employees achieve organizational goals when leaders meet or exceed an employee's expectations. Contrary to focusing on personal needs, as Maslow (1943) did, the basis of Vroom's expectancy theory is performance outcomes (Kessler, 2013; Vroom, 2013). According to Vroom, expectancy, instrumentality, and valence are primary antecedents in motivating employees to attain positive results in the work environment.

Expectancy. When employees attain work goals, motivation increases and performance improves. In the antecedent of expectancy, high performance is the result of increased effort (Purvis, Zagenczyk, & McCray, 2015). Expectancy is outcome based. Employees believe a greater amount of effort is equal to increased success (Shweiki et al., 2015). When workplace promotions are performance based, employees increase performance to compete for promotions. In contrast, promotions based on nepotism decrease motivation and performance (Shweiki et al., 2015).

Instrumentality. Researchers refer to the motivation created by the anticipation of a reward as instrumentality (Shweiki et al., 2015). The three factors affecting instrumentality are trust, control, and presence. Moreover, employees want to trust their leaders will recognize and reward performance (Taştan & Davoudi, 2015). Employees must perceive some level of control in the performance-to-reward programs to increase performance (Shweiki et al., 2015).

Valence. Valence is the value employees place on the reward (Shweiki et al., 2015). The value employees place on a reward increases motivation and performance. Individual motivation may increase when leaders vary the type reward instead of changing the work objectives (Shweiki et al., 2015). Valence refers not only to an increase in salary but also to increased autonomy, responsibility, and opportunity within the organization. Organizational rewards should be fair for employees to find value in the programs (Kessler, 2013).

Leaders applying the expectancy theory in the workplace have clarity on how employees make performance-based decisions. These leaders understand motivation and performance share a direct link to the perceived value of rewards (Frieder, Wang, & Oh, 2018). Leaders recognizing and rewarding employee performance, through promotion or abstract rewards, increase motivation, employee performance, and productivity.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's position on human motivation differs from Vroom's expectancy theory. Maslow (1943) theorized employee motivation increased when human needs are satisfied. Maslow identified five basic needs ranking from basic to higher: physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization. Choi et al. (2015) posited that employees seek to satisfy basic physiological and safety needs before focusing on the higher needs of social, esteem, and self-actualization. De Gieter and Hofmans (2015) found that employees may never thoroughly satisfy personal needs in the workplace, which may affect motivation and productivity.

Disengaged Factors

Disengaged factors are elements that may affect the level of employee work effort. Disengagement occurs when employees experience work fatigue due to increased responsibility (Sonnentag & Kühnel, 2016). Disengaged employees are less productive and negatively affect organizational profitability (Sonnentag & Kühnel, 2016). Continuous exposure to exhaustive factors such as increased work hours or responsibilities leads to poor customer satisfaction, absenteeism, and employee turnover and ultimately affects organizational profitability (So et al., 2016).

Ethical dilemmas. Clearly defined performance objectives and associated rewards motivate employees to exceed role requirements (Han et al., 2015). Employees make decisions according to their interpretation of role requirements. Ethical dilemmas occur when employees place too much emphasis on exceeding expectations (Huang & Paterson, 2017). Employees lapsing in ethical judgment may engage in unethical behavior to meet job requirements. Behavior contrary to organizational norms and standards of conduct is unethical (Kilduff, Galinsky, Gallo, & Reade, 2016). Employees may benefit and feel justified in behaving unethical in the work environment (Barkan, Ayal, & Ariely, 2015). Coworkers observing unethical behavior may perceive the culture of the workplace as unfair. Leadership's failure to address or punish unethical behavior in the workplace may lead to decreased productivity in other employees (Bonner, Greenbaum, & Quade, 2017; Kang, 2014), and employees previously considered engaged might retaliate by either associating with counterproductive behavior or decreasing productivity (Bonner, Greenbaum, & Mayer, 2016).

Moral disengagement. Employees may justify or condone undesirable behavior. Moral disengagement is the internal ability to selectively inactivate standards or beliefs to commit reprehensible actions (Niebieszczanski, Harkins, Judson, Smith, & Dixon, 2015). Morally disengaged employees justify counterproductive work behavior by making comparisons, minimizing consequences, or deflecting blame onto others. Individually, these employees process and make decisions without relying on an ethical foundation and feel no distress (Lawrence & Kacmar, 2017).

Machiavellian behavior is an indicator of the propensity to disengage morally (Egan, Hughes, & Palmer, 2015). The focus on self-interests and a blatant disregard for the effects their decisions have on others are characteristics of Machiavellianism (Castille, Buckner, & Thoroughgood, 2018). Instances of Machiavellian behavior are consistent self-regulation avoidance and morally disengaged behavior. Self-regulation is a key aspect of employee engagement, and employees exhibiting self-regulating qualities within the workplace may be less likely to exhibit Machiavellianism or moral disengagement (Ring & Kavussanu, 2018).

Negative emotions are a contributing factor to moral disengagement (Chugh, Kern, Zhu, & Lee, 2014). Employees experiencing frequent negative emotions in the work environment may reciprocate through morally disengaged behavior as an act of retribution against the organization (Huang, Wellman, Ashford, Lee, & Wang, 2017). Acts of disengaged behavior or counterproductive work behavior include daydreaming, absenteeism or malingering, and procrastination to complete work objectives (Carpenter & Berry, 2017). In contrast, engaged employees experience positive emotions induced by job requirements (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). Positive emotions expand the personal resources available to manage negative experiences in the work environment and alleviate the desire to retaliate through morally disengaged behavior (Soliman & Wahba, 2018).

Job insecurity. Job insecurity concerns may cause fear and worry for employees, specifically when the job insecurity is involuntary. Job insecurity is a factor of work engagement (Camgoz, Ozge, Pinar, & Burcu, 2016). Job insecurity refers to a concern about continued employment within an organization (Camgoz et al., 2016). Employees experience job insecurity when perceived signals in the work environment indicate the possibility of losing employment (Schumacher, Schreurs, Van Emmerick, & De Witte, 2016). An association exists between job insecurity and job satisfaction, organizational commitment, engagement, and the level of trust between an employee and an organization (Wang, Lu, & Siu, 2015).

Job insecurity is a source of stress for some employees (Piccoli & De Witte, 2015). The threat of job discontinuity can be independent of a particular crisis within the workplace (Wang et al., 2015). Prevalent threats to job security are (a) job continuity; (b) loss of promotion potential; and (c) involuntary retirement, layoff, or dismissal (Vander Elst, De Cuyper, Baillien, Niesen, & De Witte, 2016). Employees anxious about job insecurity feel less motivated in the work environment and often exhibit signs of moral disengagement (Huang et al., 2017). Employees may increase engagement when leaders within the organization express an interest in treating employees fairly to manage psychological stressors. Leaders ease psychological stress in reference to job insecurity by communicating predictability and controllability to improve employee engagement (Ouyang et al., 2015).

Organizational change. Employees may view organizational changes as a source of stress and uncertainty, and morale may decline during an organizational transition (Deniz, Noyan, & Ertosun, 2015; Smollan, 2015). Uncertainty is a contributing factor to a lack of commitment to an organization, decreased job satisfaction, and higher attrition rates, which are indicators of degraded morale and degraded organizational effectiveness (Petrou, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2018). Incorporated drawdown measures include a human aspect of leadership that requires leaders to recognize emotional labor within employees and the ability to manage those emotions to create positive outcomes (Fida et al., 2015). These drawdown measures equate to risky behavior, which may produce ill effects at the micro level of individual activities, the meso or middle level, and the larger macro levels of an organization (Denis, Ferlie, & Van Gestel, 2015; Petrou et al., 2018; van Wijk, Zietsma, Dorado, de Bakker, & Martí, 2018).

Social Learning

Social learning is an influential factor of employee engagement. Social learning is the integration of Sutherland's principles of differential association with operant behavior (Byrd, 2016; Shepherd & Button, 2018; Walters, 2015). Social learning is learned and imitated behavior through intimate relationships and includes techniques and rationalizations (Legare & Nielsen, 2015; Lieke, Johns, Lyons, & ter Hoeven, 2016). Supporters of social learning posit that an individual's learning experiences and exhibited behavior are the results of interactions with others. Thus, the differential disassociations or experiences of an individual define the attitude and meaning attached to a given action. For instance, employees tend to conform to the absenteesim and turnover behavior exhibited by other employees within an organization (Duff, Podolsky, Biron, & Chan, 2015). As individuals place different values on behavior, an individual may rationalize absenteeism to gain social acceptance within the work environment (Jourdain & Chênevert, 2015). Employees observing frequent absenteeism actions may conform to the behavior, decreasing employee engagement and productivity.

Just as individuals may influence others to perform negative or unacceptable behaviors, leaders who enact a social learning perspective can influence acceptable conduct. Employees can learn what behavior is acceptable through positive reinforcement (Walumbwa, Hartnell, & Misati, 2017). Leaders rely on social learning to influence employees to exhibit organizational commitment. Leaders can affect employee engagement by offering rewards for outstanding performance or by dispensing punishment to correct behavior that violates organizational policies or that threatens the safety of others within the work environment.

Leaders applying social learning in the workplace understand that employees learn and imitate observed behavior. Leaders identify and implement strategies to create emotional and cognitive relationships between individual employees and their assigned tasks (Choi et al., 2015). Emotional and cognitive relationships foster increased productivity, performance, and employee citizenship behavior (Al Mehrzi & Singh, 2016). Leaders must decipher when to reward acceptable behavior and when to punish unacceptable behavior to deter employees from following examples of absenteeism.

Leadership

Leadership behavior influences employee engagement. Leadership effectiveness is contingent on a leader's ability to accomplish critical tasks across individual, team, and organizational levels (Fausing, Joensson, Lewandowski, & Bligh, 2015)**.** Effective leadership directly affects corporate sustainability (Szczepańska-Woszczyna & Kurowska-Pysz, 2016). Hospitality leaders must empower team employees to perform critical tasks creatively by coaching and motivating subordinates to display confidence and proficiency in their work (Kruja, Ha, Drishti, & Oelfke, 2016). Employee motivation and ownership of assigned tasks determine the effectiveness of an organization's leadership (Popli & Rizvi, 2016). Leader efficiency equates to critical task competency (Seljak & Kvas, 2015).

Leaders are intellectuals and persuasive speakers with shrewd decision-making skills (Gousy & Green, 2015). All effective leaders possess certain characteristics (Laureani & Antony, 2017; Watts, 2016). However, researchers disagree on whether leaders are born with certain identifiable skills or emerge through experience based on trial and error (Dizaho, Salleh, & Abdullah, 2017; Elgar, 2016).

Leadership style is a key factor to employee engagement (Popli & Rizvi, 2016). A leader should vary leadership style based on the individual employee and the situation to promote employee engagement. Effective leaders employ the proper leadership style to meet employee expectations by promoting improved job performance (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). Leaders influence work engagement through leadership style (Manning, 2016).

Leadership Styles

Effective leaders strive to develop programs that reinforce positive employee behavior to increase employee engagement (Popli, Popli, Rizvi, & Rizvi, 2017). Established programs include leadership styles to influence employee behavior. Leaders may choose a leadership style based on the situation or task rather than focusing solely on the individual employee (Mathieu, Fabi, Lacoursièr, & Raymond, 2016). Effective leaders understand leadership style may affect employee engagement (Popli & Rizvi, 2015).

Transformational leadership. Leaders employ transformational leadership to inspire subordinates to complete a task. The ability to motivate subordinates into compliance through emphasizing direction and purpose is a characteristic of transformational leadership (Hentrich et al., 2016). Leaders motivate subordinates to accomplish individual work tasks and transcend the self and organizational expectations. Transformational leaders are visionaries who change the culture of the organization and implement adaptable changes in the environment (Kim & Kim, 2015). Inspirational leaders accentuate the outcome of a mission by inciting greater commitment to duty to enhance job performance.

Transformational leaders are leaders who excite permanent change within an organization. Transformational leaders can align organizational and subordinate beliefs, goals, and expectations (Iorio & Taylor, 2015). Transformational leaders are people-oriented and understand what motivates each subordinate. Transformational leaders seek support from subordinates by eliciting innovative ideas and problem-solving skills to advance tasks. Employing transformational leadership styles, particularly with teams, is useful in aligning individual goals with team goals and ultimately organizational goals.

Transformational leaders understand expectancy theory and work to improve employee engagement by addressing employee needs. An established connection exists between employee engagement, transformational leadership, and improved employee performance (Anderson & Sun, 2017; Pourbarkhordari, Zhou, & Pourkarimi, 2016; Schaubroeck, Lam, & Peng, 2016). Over time, transformational leaders build trust and the ability to influence employee engagement (Chughtai, Byrne, & Flood, 2015). Transformational leaders improve employee performance by creating an environment of trust and respect, as such relationships will result in followers displaying unwavering confidence in the leaders and the organization. Transformational leadership has a positive correlation with improved employee engagement and optimism (Hawkes, Biggs, & Hegerty, 2017; Popli & Rizvi, 2016). Transformational leaders promote engagement by operating at the interpersonal level with an employee, displaying empathy when required, and building healthy relationships through effective communication (Menci, Wefald, & van Iterrsum, 2016).

Transactional leadership. Whereas transformational leadership is the act of motivating employees to perform, the transactional leadership style involves rewarding employees for increased performance process. Transactional leadership is a performance-based leadership style through reward and punishment, by exception (Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2015). Transactional leadership is the link between job performance, a reward-based system, and providing subordinates with resources to achieve organizational goals. A transactional leader's primary focus is accomplishing critical tasks (Deichmann & Stam, 2015; Gifford, Graham, Ehrhart, Davies, & Aarons, 2017). As a taskmaster, a transactional leader uses praise and fear to motivate subordinates to accomplish assigned tasks. The exchange–influence technique allows leaders to employ rewards or punishments as tools to influence subordinate performance.

Leaders must understand the structure of a task and assess the skill, knowledge, and personality of subordinates, in addition to removing any obstacles that may impede the subordinates' performance. The primary focus for the transactional leader is the task, and from the start to the completion of the work, transactional leaders continually develop problem-solving strategies and set the conditions for subordinates to succeed, which includes removing obstacles to success (Deichmann & Stam, 2015; LePine, Zhang, Crawford, & Rich, 2016). Using transactional leadership is a viable strategy for increasing productivity, as transactional leaders develop subordinate relationships based on an exchange of rewards for good performance and readdressing roles and expectations for poor performance (Hayati, Atefi, & Ahearne, 2018). Leaders then distribute rewards among the team according to performance outcomes. Leaders are also responsible for addressing the expectations of the group and adapting their leadership style to the subordinates and the situation throughout the process. In transactional leadership, a leader may not empower subordinates to improve their performance but may instead use rewards (Tung, 2016). Transactional leadership is a suitable approach for subordinates who may not commit to the vision of the organization or the leader (Patiar & Wang, 2016).

Laissez-faire leadership. Employees may perceive laissez-faire leadership as passive and lacking commitment to the organization and to employees. Leaders exhibiting laissez-faire leadership exercise avoidance techniques or fail to act when employees require leadership (Buch, Martinsen, & Kuvaas, 2015). Laissez-faire leaders contribute to role ambiguity in the workplace and may affect the level of employee engagement (Buch et al., 2015). Researchers disagree about whether some instances of laissez-faire leadership empower employees to perform tasks (Wong & Glessner, 2015). Some employees may view laissez-faire leadership as ineffective and detrimental to employee engagement (Wong & Glessner, 2015). Employees may not respond to laissez-faire leadership because the leader may not fulfill expectations. Employees may thus engage in withdrawal behaviors, experience increased stress, and leave an organization when expectations remain unfulfilled (Carpenter & Berry, 2017; Proell, Sauer, & Rodgers, 2016).

Although age is a viable factor to consider in leadership effectiveness, leaders must be willing to draw on experience and emotional data in a situation for sound decision-making. Leadership is a life-long process requiring continuous exposure to learning for effective outcomes (Raymer, Dobbs, Kelley, & Lindsay, 2018). Effective leaders employ situation theory to determine which leadership style is appropriate based on a situation (Amanchukwu, Stanley, & Ololube, 2015). Leaders must consider subordinates’ ability, knowledge, and confidence level to determine the appropriate leadership style to employ in a situation (Jyoti & Bhau, 2016). Leaders must exhibit engagement to provide an example for employees to follow (Carasco-Saul et al., 2015).

Leaders foster improved employee engagement by integrating the right leadership style for individuals and a current evaluation of the situation (Weng, 2017).

Leadership Behavior

Leadership behavior influences the level of employee engagement in the work environment Leaders should understand the influential factors in employee engagement while managing organizational expectations and addressing customer concerns (Albrecht et al., 2015). Leaders establish trust relationships through positive, reliable interactions with employees to improve employee engagement (Downey, Werff, Thomas, & Plaut, 2015). Leaders build trust by evaluating employees and displaying situational awareness to enhance employee engagement (Hsieh & Wang, 2015). Leaders continue to establish trust by working closely with individual employees to maintain personal relationships. Through this trust relationship, leaders can interpret the organizational vision for an employee to align employee actions with expectations to improve employee engagement (Hsieh & Wang, 2015).

Leaders influence employee engagement by promoting teamwork. Leaders improve the work environment by fostering a team mentality to improve employee engagement (Sanner-Stiehr & Kueny, 2017). Leaders reinforce organizational objectives to promote shared work values among team members to improve the work environment and increase engagement (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). Teams sharing the same values encourage one another to engage in rewarding tasks and participate in decisions affecting the group (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). While promoting teamwork, leaders must balance expectations and demands to prevent burnout and unhealthy competition among team members (Sijbom, Lang, & Anseel, 2018). Engaged teams contribute to the success of organizations in the hospitality industry (Guchait, 2016).

Leaders influence employee engagement by operating under a code of ethics and relying on a moral compass for decision making. Leaders exhibiting ethical decision-making skills influence employee job performance and engagement (Demirtas, 2015; Kang, 2014). Leaders operating under a code of ethics reinforce acceptable behavior, energize employees, provide additional opportunities for development, and establish job autonomy for employees (Srivastava & Dhar, 2016). Displays of ethical leadership stimulate employee engagement and increase productivity (Engelbrecht, Heine, & Mahembe, 2017).

Distributed leadership is the practice of encouraging collaboration and partnership between leaders and subordinates (Quintana & Morales, 2015). Trust relationships between the leader and the subordinate are the foundation for successful distributed leadership. Distributed leadership may improve employee engagement and empowers employees to take ownership and responsibility of tasks, as well as establishes commitment to the organization and leadership (Tian, Risku, & Collin, 2016). A leader refusing to implement distributed leadership may choose to micromanage personnel, which is an ineffective technique in complex organizations due to the myriad of tasks required for daily operations.

Destructive leadership. The dark side of leadership involves more than displaying behavior that undermines the goals set by organizational leaders. Destructive leadership includes behavior in which leaders act unethically, tyrannically, or abusively to advance their personal agenda or meet organizational objectives (Collins & Jackson, 2015; Singh, Dev, & Sengupta, 2017). Ultimately, this continued behavior may jeopardize the fitness of an organizational environment and employee well-being.

Destructive leadership behavior that is unintentional occurs because of a lack of training. Destructive leadership behavior is systematic and occurs over time (Balwant, 2017), and such leadership behavior may be intentional, unintentional, physical, verbal, or nonverbal. When leaders intentionally exhibit destructive leadership behavior, the environment is hostile or obstructive. Intentional destructive leadership behavior may involve public ridicule or impeding teamwork (Tariq & Weng, 2018). The one constant in destructive leadership behavior is an adverse outcome for the subordinate subjected to the abusive behavior and for the organization (Balwant, 2017; Naseer, Raja, Syed, Donia, & Darr, 2016). Leaders exhibiting destructive leadership behavior use their power and influence to achieve personal gain.

In 2005, Lipman-Blumen introduced the concept of toxic leadership as a destructive leadership behavior (Pelletier, 2012). Toxic leaders create hostile work environments that include verbal threats, direct attacks on employee proficiency, and acts of character assassination (Armitage, 2015). The primary focus of a toxic leader is obtaining and maintaining control, ultimately creating an environment of intimidation and fear (Fraher, 2016). Employees with low self-esteem and a lack of confidence in their abilities conform to the malicious attacks of toxic leadership and accept the treatment as deserved. These employees work in fear of reprisal from reporting this destructive leadership behavior. Rather than intercede on the behalf of victimized employees, other employees, or colluders, may thrive in a toxic environment. Colluders support toxic actions and share the same disregard for ethical values (Chua & Murray, 2015). Toxic leadership affects employees and extends throughout an organization, thereby creating adverse outcomes (Cheang & Appelbaum, 2015).

The occurrence of destructive leadership is an important consideration for organizational leaders. Victims of destructive leadership often suffer from symptoms of social stress similar to the symptoms of posttraumatic stress, and destructive leadership can have a debilitating effect on employees (Gardner & Rasmussen, 2018). For this reason, the consequences of destructive leadership often remain misdiagnosed or mismanaged once identified by organizational leadership (Gardner et al., 2016). The difficulty in identifying destructive leadership behavior is the number of exhibited characteristics associated with destructive leadership that extend beyond the contentious verbal and nonverbal behaviors displayed in abusive supervisory behavior (Balwant, 2017; Collins & Jackson, 2015).

Destructive leadership behavior may begin before employees take a leadership role within an organization. Employees engaging in deviant behavior may continue this behavior when promoted to management or leadership positions (Tuna, Ghazzawi, Yesiltas, Tuna, & Arslan, 2016). Narcissism and Machiavellianism both emerged as predictors of workplace deviance (Mackey, Frieder, Brees, & Martinko, 2015). Employees exhibiting these traits thrive on power and status, both obtained through leadership positions. With leadership positions comes access to resources, such as rewards and punishment; leaders may continue to demonstrate undesirable behavior that may have substantial effects on motivation and employee engagement.

Summary

The literature review included an introduction to the theoretical framework of Kahn’s personal engagement theory. Kahn (1990) posited employees assert varying degrees of expressing themselves either cognitively, emotionally, or physically during the performance of their job duties. According to Kahn (1990), the psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety, and availability influence employee work engagement. In 1992, Kahn expounded on his conceptual framework of personal engagement to further describe employee engagement as the degree employees are psychologically present while at work (Ramsey et al., 2015). Kahn believed leadership behavior may influence employee engagement. Effective leaders employ various styles to influence employee behavior. For example, transactional leaders focus on the primary task and motivate employees through an established award-based system to improve employee performance, while transformational leaders establish connections with employees to improve performance (Anderson & Sun, 2017; Masa'deh, Obeidat, & Tarhini, 2016; Zheng, Wu, & Xie, 2017). Effective leaders tailor leadership style to meet psychological conditions and foster employee engagement.

Transition

The intent of the first section of this doctoral study was to present foundational elements for the study, including the problem, purpose, and conceptual framework. The review of the literature led to an understanding of the issues and of past research related to employee engagement from a business perspective. The literature review included an analysis of the behavioral characteristics of employee engagement and leadership. Understanding the different behavioral characteristics of employee engagement can help leaders determine which leadership style is appropriate for improving employee engagement. Failure to improve employee engagement may negatively affect productivity and, in the future, organizational profitability and sustainability.

The purpose of Section 2 is to present the methodology and research strategies. I also address my role as the researcher and the role of the participants. In Section 3, I present the findings of this study, applications for business practices, implications for social change, and recommendations for action and further research.

Section 2: The Project

The goal of this doctoral study was to research hospitality industry leaders' strategies to improve employee engagement. The revelation of effective strategies to improve employee engagement may lead to increased profitability by lowering costs associated with employee turnover. Section 2 of the doctoral study includes an explanation of the methodology and the research process.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies business leaders use to improve employee engagement for increased productivity. The target population consisted of business leaders from six organizations within the hospitality industry in South Korea with at least 3 years of leadership experience who applied strategies with the intention to improve employee engagement to increase productivity.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I assumed the role of the primary data collection instrument in this doctoral study. The researcher serves as the primary data collection instrument (Fusch & Ness, 2017). I have studied leadership in both civilian and military classrooms and have over 15 years of experience as a leader. My previous experience with interviewing human subjects for academic research and interviewing for vacant positions enhanced my questioning and data recording techniques.

My interest in employee engagement stemmed from observations of engaged and disengaged employee behavior within the work environment. Researchers use work experience as a catalyst for investigating challenges and leadership decisions to improve working conditions (Marsh & Farrell, 2015). Participants are more apt to provide less guarded answers when there is no established relationship with the researcher (Byrne, Brugha, Clarke, Lavelle, & McGarvey, 2015). No established relationships existed between the participants and me.

I completed the National Institutes of Health training course titled Protecting Human Research Participants (Certificate No. 2496206). I reviewed the *Belmont Report*'s Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978). The purpose of the *Belmont Report* was to outline the ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice when conducting research involving human subjects. Accordingly, all participants have a right to fair treatment, respect, and protection from any harm while participating in research (Hébert et al., 2015; Jones et al., 2017; Yip, Han, & Sng, 2016).

While conducting research, I gained the trust of each participant. I established a rapport with the participants, remained unbiased throughout the interview process, and did not voice any personal views during the interviews. Researchers must remove bias during research to allow participants to describe their experience with the phenomenon accurately (Fusch & Ness, 2017). Reducing personal bias during the interview process may prevent researcher influence and reinforces trust between the researcher and the participant (Bengtsson, 2016; Oates, 2015). Researchers may mitigate personal bias by integrating the use of a reflective journal throughout the data collection process as a tool to monitor researcher perceptions that may interfere with the research process (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Thomas & Stoeckel, 2016). In my role as the researcher, I kept a reflective journal to assist with interpreting data and mitigating personal bias. Establishing a rapport and remaining unbiased during interviews established trust with the participant.

Participants may find sharing personal experiences difficult. During data collection, participants may share information that may be sensitive and may have unforeseen risks to the participants' or to others' careers (Wolgemuth et al., 2015). A researcher has the sole responsibility to protect the identity and confidentiality of the participants and their answers (Hébert et al., 2015). For those reasons, I followed an interview protocol (see Appendix). The purpose of the interview protocol was to maintain consistency and to protect data and confidentiality (Heydon & Powell, 2018; Jacob & Ferguson, 201). An interview protocol includes the interview questions, serves as a procedure for the researcher, and includes a script to (a) open and close each interview, (b) prompt the researcher to gain informed consent through explaining the protocol for data protection and confidentiality, and (c) address any questions participants may have prior to beginning the interview (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

Participants

The participant sample for this doctoral study was one business leader each who spoke and understood English fluently from six different organizations within the hospitality industry located in South Korea. Criteria for participant eligibility included at least 3 years of experience as leaders within the organization and applied strategies to improve employee engagement to increase productivity. Leaders with 3 years of leadership experience should have developed competencies and ability to demonstrate leadership credibility (Havaei, Dahinten, & MacPhee, 2015; McNair, 2014). Leaders with the requisite amount of experience may have developed enough knowledge, skill, and influence to create a healthy work environment by fostering employee engagement (Démeh & Rosengren, 2015; Swensen, Gorringe, Caviness, & Peters, 2016). The collective experiences of the participants led to meaningful strategies to address disengaged employee behavior in the work environment.

Google was a resource used to identify well-known hospitality businesses fitting my delimitations. The Internet is a viable means to recruit participants for research (Bender, Cyr, Arbuckle, & Ferris, 2017). After identifying hospitality businesses on the Internet, I called and set appointments to conduct an initial site visit to gain access to participants. Site visits provide researchers context for work environments and serve as an opportunity to gain access to potential participants (Balasubramanian et al., 2015; Cherry et al., 2017). Researchers use site visits to conduct the initial screening process to determine if participants meet qualifying criteria (Ellis et al., 2015). After identifying senior managers in the organization, I introduced myself, provided the purpose of the doctoral study, explained the criteria for participants, and asked if any employees fit the criteria. Prior to asking to contact potential participants via e-mail and telephone, I initiated a partnership agreement with each organization willing to support this doctoral study.

My strategy for establishing a working relationship with participants was to follow my interview protocol (see Appendix). My responsibility as the researcher was to greet all participants warmly, thank them for their time and contribution to this study, and establish a rapport with them. After verifying the participant’s understanding of the purpose and goals for this study, I asked each participant if there were any questions before proceeding. Commitment and trust emerge from treating participants with respect throughout the interview (Coulter, Mallett, & Singer, 2016; Lee, 2016). During the interview, I was attentive to my nonverbal cues. This is because displays of a researcher’s personal bias may influence participants’ answers and cause participants to distrust a researcher (Kornbluh, 2015). Participants are more likely to provide truthful and descriptive answers rather than socially accepted answers during an interview when there is an established level of comfort and trust (Choo, Garro, Ranney, Meisel, & Morrow Guthrie, 2015; Lee, Bartolomei, & Pittaway, 2016).

Research Method and Design

The purpose of the research method and design section of this doctoral study was to provide justification for using the qualitative method. The application of a qualitative methodology originated from an interest to discover the participants’ experience with employee engagement. The qualitative method was the most effective approach to elicit the perspectives of hospitality leaders and their experience with strategies to improve employee engagement to increase productivity.

Research Method

The goal of this doctoral study was to explore participants' experiences concerning strategies to improve employee engagement. The qualitative methodology is appropriate to obtain participants' point of view and perspectives on a particular phenomenon (Wolgemuth et al., 2015). The perspectives and experiences shared by participants may address a perceived gap in existing knowledge (Mead, Cohen, Kennedy, Gallo, & Latkin, 2015; Nasomboon, 2014). Qualitative questions are open-ended and allow participants to provide in-depth information on their experience concerning a phenomenon (Oates, 2015). As the intent of this research was to obtain leaders' points of view and perspectives on improving employee engagement, a qualitative method was appropriate.

The goal of quantitative methods is to support or refute a stated hypothesis (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Quantitative approaches involve closed-ended interview questions that limit the rich in-depth response researchers solicit in qualitative approaches (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Sanderson et al., 2016). Quantitative researchers evaluate hypotheses to determine if a relationship exists between two or more variables (Spicker, 2018). The quantitative method was not suitable for this study, as it was not the purpose of this study to determine a causal link between variables.

Mixed methodology yields a broad perspective of the depth and breadth of understanding of a phenomenon (Palinkas et al., 2015). Mixed methods approaches increase the potential for researchers to insert personal bias during data collection (Hagler, Hamby, Grych, & Banyard, 2015). Mixed methodological research is complex and requires the collection and analysis of numerical and narrative data (McKim, 2015). Mixed methods research did not fully align with the purpose of this doctoral study, as the complex data that would emerge from analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data would extend beyond the scope of exploring hospitality leaders' perspectives concerning strategies to improve employee engagement.

Research Design

Researchers apply various designs for qualitative methodology. When deciding on a qualitative design, I reviewed ethnographic, phenomenological, grounded theory, narrative, and case study designs. Ethnography involves studying a culture within an environment rather than considering any evidence that may moderate the phenomenon studied (Fusch & Ness, 2017; Rashid et al., 2015). Ethnographers embed themselves within the community and observe participants in their natural setting to understand the culture fully (Robinson et al., 2017). As the focus of this doctoral study did not involve participating in cultural immersion to understand a phenomenon, the ethnographic design was not appropriate.

The purpose of phenomenological design is to gather the lived experiences described by participants (Johnston, Walls, Oprescu, & Gray, 2017). Only those who have personal experience with a phenomenon can effectively communicate the experience in phenomenology (Aloha, Piirainen, & Skjaerven, 2017). However, phenomenology is not broad enough to provide a holistic view of the participants' experience and perspectives regarding the phenomenon under study (Cibangu & Hepworth, 2016). The phenomenological approach also faces limitations regarding the sources of data available and may fail to discover all emergent themes (Kruth, 2015). Due to the limited depth of data collected during phenomenological research, the design was not a good fit for this study.

Interpretive descriptions strongly influence both phenomenology and grounded theory (Berterö, 2015). In grounded theory, researchers systematically gather and analyze data to establish a theory (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2018). Grounded theory is not appropriate for research with substantial theoretical history (Gandomani, Zulzalil, Ghani, Sultan, & Parizi, 2015). As disengaged employee behavior has a substantial theoretical history, a grounded theory approach was not appropriate for this study. Narrative design was not a good fit for this doctoral study, as a common result of the narrative design research includes the personal biases of both the participants and the researcher (Betsch, Haase, Renkewitz, & Schmid, 2015; Ruppel & Mey, 2015).

After comparing and contrasting the different qualitative designs and considering the business problem, a case study design emerged as the most suitable design for this doctoral study. Case study designs are appropriate when exploring dynamic and complex business environments (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). Case study designs provide researchers with the opportunity to explore a phenomenon as it occurs in the environment by asking *how* or *why* questions (Johansen, 2014; Tsang, 2014). The case study approach supports using semistructured interviews with participants and analyzing documentation as a means to study the phenomenon (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). The case study design is also appropriate when researchers have an opportunity to develop personal interactions with participants as they perform daily tasks (Morgan et al., 2017; Tsang, 2014).

Researchers employ a multiple case study design to discover similarities and differences between several cases experiencing the same phenomenon (Yin, 2014). Employing a multiple case study design was appropriate for this doctoral study to explore strategies to improve employee engagement.

Employing a multiple case study design may contribute to developing the knowledge and understanding of a phenomenon (Yazan, 2015). Data gathered using the multiple case study approach serves to encourage contextual perspectives rich in emergent themes (Tu, 2016). A sample size of at least six business leaders from different organizations should produce enough data to produce 97% saturation during data analysis in qualitative research (Saunders et al., 2018; Savage, Februhartanty, & Worsley, 2017). Data saturation occurs when no new emergent themes emerge (Varpio, Ajjawi, Monrouxe, O'brien, & Rees, 2017). If I did not reach data saturation after six interviews, I would have interviewed additional participants as needed until data saturation occurred. Additional interviews and member checking ensure researchers achieve data saturation (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016; Harvey, 2015).

Population and Sampling

Purposive sampling is acceptable in multiple case studies because the participants have similar knowledge and experience with the phenomenon under study (Akgün, Keskin, Ayar, & Okunakol, 2017; Hadi & Closs, 2016). Purposive sampling is a nonrandom strategy based on participants' unique experience with a phenomenon (Robinson, 2014; Wirth, Houts, & Deal, 2016). Researchers use purposive sampling to select a participant sample based on a common experience with the phenomenon (Marks, 2015). The selection of a purposive sampling for this study aligned with Jabbour, Neto, Gobbo, de Souza Ribeiro, and de Sousa Jabbour (2015), who studied factors for engagement as a human critical success factor in prominent Brazilian organizations.

Researchers have not determined a commonly accepted sample size for qualitative studies (Elo et al., 2014). According to Draper and Swift (2011), a suitable sample size for qualitative research is between five and 25. Palinkas et al. (2015) concluded researchers should consider a population large enough to enhance credibility and small enough to provide rich detail of the phenomenon. Yin (2009) noted a sample size of at least four cases is acceptable. The sample of one business leader each from six organizations aligned with Yin’s guidance and was large enough to reach data saturation.

In qualitative research, the number of participants required to produce validity is contingent on data saturation (Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2016). The foundation for data saturation consists of four elements: (a) original sample size, (b) number of interviews required, (c) reliability of data analysis using multiple coding, and (d) ease of evaluating data (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014). Data saturation occurs after the emergence of ideas ceases, when the data collected represents a majority of the participants, and when replication of research will yield the same results (Finfgeld-Connett, 2013; Malterud et al., 2016; Tran, Porcher, Tran, & Ravaud, 2017). The sample of six participants yielded enough data through semistructured interviews to achieve data saturation.

The sample for this doctoral study met the following criteria: (a) resided in South Korea, (b) spoke and understood English fluently, (c) had at least 3 years’ leadership experience within the hospitality industry, and (d) employed strategies to improve employee engagement to increase productivity. Leaders with at least 3 years of experience should have the requisite competencies and credibility to provide insight on strategies to improve employee engagement (Havaei et al., 2015; McNair, 2014). Leaders with at least 3 years of experience may have developed strategies to improve employee engagement to increase productivity (Jeve et al., 2015; Kortmann, Gelhard, Zimmermann, & Piller, 2014).

Internet search engines may maximize participant recruitment in a confined geographical area (Bender et al., 2017; Heywood et al., 2015; Wise et al., 2016). I used Google to identify hospitality businesses and called to set an appointment with senior managers to conduct an initial site visit. The purpose of a site visit is to provide researchers with an unbiased context of the work environment (Bliesemann de Guevara, 2016; Ellis et al., 2015). Researchers also use site visits to gain access to participants and to conduct initial screenings to see if participants meet the qualifying criteria (Ash et al., 2015; Cherry et al., 2017).

Identifying senior managers in the organization assisted in gaining access to participants during the initial site visit. After an exchange of pleasantries and a brief introduction of myself, I provided the purpose of this doctoral study and explained the criteria for participants. Explaining the purpose of the study provided senior managers context and assisted the managers in identifying potential participants. To meet the criteria for this study, each participant had to reside in South Korea, spoke and understood English fluently, needed at least 3 years' leadership experience within the hospitality industry, and must have employed strategies to improve employee engagement to increase productivity.

After initiating a partnership agreement with each organization, I contacted participants who fit the criteria of this study and set an appointment for a face-to face interview. Face-to-face interviews provide an opportunity to observe the participants' nonverbal cues (Iacono, Symonds, & Brown, 2016; Seitz, 2016). In-person interviews allow researchers to observe nonverbal cues, which add context to the participants' responses (Shapka, Domene, Khan, & Yang, 2016). The location of qualitative interviews can hinder the ability to establish trust between the participant and the researcher (Ancker et al., 2015). Interviews conducted in a familiar environment can empower participants to speak candidly about their experience with a phenomenon (Heath, Williamson, Williams, & Harcourt, 2018), and conducting interviews in a relatively quiet area of the work environment prevents interruptions and background noise (Oates, 2015). Participant interviews occurring in participants' natural work environment provide rich context to the shared information (Brinkmann, 2016; Gustafsson Jertfelt, Blanchin, & Li, 2016; Skjelsbæk, 2016). I asked for and received permission to use an office at each location. Conducting the interviews in an office provided a quiet environment and limited interruptions during the face-to-face interviews with the participants.

Ethical Research

All participants reviewed, signed, and received a copy of the consent form prior to the interview process. The purpose of a consent form is to outline ethical responsibilities with regard to confidentiality (Koonrungsesomboom, Laothavorn, & Karbwang, 2015). A consent form is an agreement between a participant and a researcher that all personal information will remain confidential and that the researcher may share research results (Helgesson, 2015; Nair & Ibrahim, 2015). The consent form also provides participants with information concerning the purpose of the research, potential benefits for participating in the study, and procedures for withdrawing from participation without penalty (Kaye et al., 2015). Dating and signing the consent form indicates a desire to participate (Helgesson, 2015; Nair & Ibrahim, 2015; Sawyer, Pushpa-Rajah, Chhoa, Duley, & Ayers 2017). Prior to conducting the interview, each participant received information regarding the right to withdraw from this doctoral study prior to publication without consequence. Participants could withdraw from the study by e-mail or by phone at any point during the doctoral study. There were no incentives for participating in this study; however, each participant will receive a written thank-you letter and a summary of the doctoral study findings after publication.

Each participant received a copy of the signed consent form. As noted in the confidentiality statement of the consent form, protection of participant confidentiality was a priority during and after this study (Petrova, Dewing, & Camilleri, 2016). Assigning a distinct participant identification number known only to the researcher is a process to maintain the confidentiality of participants (Vogel et al., 2015). Unique identification numbers protect the anonymity of participants (Saunders, Kitzinger, & Kitzinger, 2015). Each participant received a unique identification number to protect anonymity and to maintain confidentiality throughout the study. The identification numbers began with P01 and continued consecutively through P06. Consecutive numbering contributes to the accountability of participant interviews while transcribing and coding data (Paul et al., 2014). To ensure confidentiality, researchers can save all records to a password-protected medium, such as a laptop or hard drive (McElhinney, Cheater, & Kidd, 2014; Muscab, Kernohan, Wallace, Haper, & Martin, 2015). Data remained on a password-protected hard drive. The hard drive and any written documentation will remain securely stored in a safe for 5 years, to align with recommendations by Williams et al. (2014). After 5 years, I will permanently destroy all data by erasing the hard drive and shredding any written documentation.

Data Collection Instruments

Qualitative research includes direct interaction with participants to solicit experience with a phenomenon (Kornbluh, 2015). A researcher is the primary data collection instrument in qualitative methods (Fusch & Ness, 2017). My role in this doctoral study was to act as the primary data collection instrument. A researcher's responsibility is to compile participants' experience and perceptions with the phenomenon and identify themes that may advance the field of study (Ganapathy, 2016). As the researcher, my role was an impartial data collection instrument who did not exhibit personal bias to responses to the research questions during the interview process.

Semistructured, face-to-face interviews are effective tools in assisting researchers in understanding participants' experience (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Røthing Malterud & Frich, 2015). Researchers employ semistructured interviews to explore participants' perceptions of a phenomenon by asking probing questions (Whittemore, 2014). Semistructured interviews provide participants an opportunity to provide rich descriptions of experiences with the phenomenon under study (Leko, 2014). All participants in this study participated in the semistructured interview process to explore their experience with strategies to improve employee engagement to increase productivity.

Participants had the opportunity to member-check data to ensure accuracy or to correct interpretations of the data collected by providing verbal feedback. The member-checking process is a tool to increase the credibility of research (Caretta, 2015; Chronister, Marsiglio, Linville, & Lantrip, 2014). After each interview, I verbally summarized each participant's response to the interview questions. The member-checking process provides participants with the opportunity to provide feedback after the data collection process to ensure the accuracy and correct interpretation of data and to lead to increased reliability and validity (Elo et al., 2014; Mueller & Buckley, 2014).

An additional primary source of data is document review (Aparicio, Centeno, Carrasco, Barbosa, & Arantzamendi, 2017; Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). Analyzing company documents provides researchers with a holistic view of participant experiences within the focus of a study (Manteuffel, Tofan, Koziolek, Goldschmidt, & Avgeriou, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Thomas (2015) posited document analysis might assist researchers in identifying or reinforcing key themes. I analyzed company human resource policies and position descriptions to explore further the participants' experience with strategies to improve employee engagement.

An interview protocol is a set of rules and guidelines to conduct an interview (Dikko, 2016). Researchers develop an interview protocol to create a standard for each interview that may increase data reliability (McCallum, Mikocka-Walus, Gaughwin, Andrews, & Turnbull, 2015). The interview protocol should prompt a researcher to inform the participants of the researcher's sole responsibility to protect their identity and the confidentiality of their answers (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). As the primary data collection instrument, I (a) adhered to the guidelines set forth in the interview protocol, (b) conducted semistructured interviews and posed open-ended interview questions, and (c) reviewed company documents to discover a holistic view of participants' experience.

Data Collection Technique

The primary data collection technique for this doctoral study was semistructured interviews. Semistructured interviews provide several advantages during case study research (Komppula, 2014). Semistructured interviews provide participants the opportunity to share their perceptions and experiences with the phenomenon under study (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Røthing et al., 2015). Personal engagement with the participants allows for observing participant behavior, including nonverbal cues (Khan, Tang, & Joshi, 2014). Face-to-face semistructured interviews provide an opportunity for one-on-one engagement with the participants while observing the participants in their natural work environment and documenting nonverbal cues (Khan et al., 2014; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). A disadvantage to semistructured interviews is questions that lack adaptability to individual participants' experience, which decreases accuracy in participants' responses (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Røthing et al., 2015). In addition, semistructured interviews increase the difficulty in analyzing and comparing participant responses to open-ended questions (Oates, 2015). I used face-to-face semistructured interviews to solicit participants' experience and perceptions with strategies to improve employee engagement.

The interview protocol (see Appendix) included an outline of the process to collect data by asking interview questions and potential follow-up questions to clarify or extend data. While adhering to the interview protocol, I rephrased questions and asked appropriate follow-up questions to achieve greater depth and understanding of the participants' experience. Researchers should digitally record interviews for accuracy (McGonagle, Brown, & Schoeni, 2015). Digital recording devices may distract participants visually during an interview (Palys & Atchison, 2012). One method to avoid distraction is to establish rapport to keep participants focused and engaged during the interview (Seitz, 2016). An advantage of digitally recording interviews is interview integrity (Nordstrom, 2015, 2014). After receiving written consent from the participant, I digitally recorded each interview. Digitally recording each interview helps to ensure data accuracy (Nordstrom, 2015, 2014). I transcribed each recording immediately after each interview and reviewed the transcript text while listening to the digital recording. Recording the interview helps capture missing data and helps confirm the interview responses (Ancker et al., 2015).

Taking field notes during each interview to record researcher observations captures the nonverbal communication of the participants (Wilson, Onwuegbuzie, & Manning, 2016). A disadvantage to taking notes during the interview is that the researcher may need to seek further clarification on responses (O'hagan et al., 2014). However, follow-up questions allow researchers to interpret participant responses accurately and provide the participants with the opportunity to expound or clarify responses (McGonagle et al., 2015). I used my field notes to record nonverbal cues and to identify possible key points or patterns during the interviews.

A multiple case study approach allows researchers to analyze documents. Document analysis is the process of systematically reviewing documents, such as company human resource policies and position descriptions, to gain an understanding of the phenomenon (Aparicio et al., 2017). Document analysis serves as a way to triangulate data (Yin, 2014). On the contrary, document analysis could be interpreting incorrectly, providing inaccurate data (Aparicio et al., 2017). Documents analyzed during this doctoral study were company human resource policies and position descriptions.

A member-checking process improves data dependability by allowing participants to verify the interpretation of data (Elo et al., 2014). Member checking is a technique employed to solicit feedback from participants after the data collection process (Engward & Davis, 2015). After each interview, I offered my interpretation of the respondents' comments from the interview for participant verification. This process continued until the data were an accurate reflection of the interview. Depending on the accuracy of the data, the member-checking process may be tedious (Birt et al., 2016; Bucci et al., 2015), but the member-checking process improves the dependability of data (Mueller & Buckley, 2014; O'Mara, McDonald, Gillespie, Brown, & Miles, 2014).

Data Organization Technique

Researchers employ data organization techniques to assist in answering the overarching research question (Messina, 2015). Data organization techniques serve as a system to maintain the integrity of data during the collection process (Hazen, Boone, Ezell, & Jones-Farmer, 2014). Qualitative data emerge in the form of words derived from the experiences participants share during interviews (Konopaski, Jack, & Hamilton, 2015). I digitally recorded each interview and took notes to document my personal thoughts and the nonverbal cues participants displayed during the interviews. Researchers use field notes to record personal thoughts and identify emergent themes throughout a study (Thomas & Stoeckel, 2016). Field notes assist in identifying and mitigating researcher bias (Bussard, 2015). Referring to notes during the transcription process is one way to recount an interview accurately (Javadi & Zarea, 2016). I referred to my field notes while transcribing each interview to assist in recounting verbal and nonverbal cues.

Researchers use electronic software to organize participant responses and save transcribed interviews by themes (Sotiriadou, Brouwers, & Le, 2014). NVivo is software developed to support the organization and analysis of data (Woods, Paulus, Atkins, & Macklin, 2016). NVivo Version 10 software was the instrument selected to organize emergent themes that might address strategies to improve employee engagement for increased productivity. Excel spreadsheets assist in organizing data exported from NVivo (Gibbons & Ryan, 2015). Excel spreadsheets augment NVivo software and assist in organizing themes (Bradley, Kirby, & Madriaga, 2015). Moreover, using spreadsheets in conjunction with electronic software may address threats to validity (Castleberry, 2014; Gibbons & Ryan, 2015). I exported emergent themes identified through NVivo into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to organize emergent themes.

To ensure confidentiality, researchers can save all records to a password-protected medium, such as a laptop or hard drive (McElhinney et al., 2014; Muscab et al., 2015). I maintained data on a password-protected hard drive. Pencarrick Hertzman, Meagher, and McGrail (2013) suggested researchers should destroy all data at the end of a 5-year period. Data collected during this study will remain in a secure location for 5 years, and I will shred paper documentation and erase the electronic hard drive after 5 years.

Data Analysis

Yin's (2014) method of data analysis requires researchers to discover emergent themes to address research questions. I compiled the collected data consisting of interview transcripts, company documentation, and my field notes. After compiling all collected data, researchers disassemble data through discarding inconclusive data and reassembling data by identifying connections between consistent themes (Davis, 2014). Patterns in the data emerge through methodological triangulation of interviews, notes, and documents to interpret data meaning (Galson et al., 2017).

Denzin (1978) presented methodological triangulation as the principle approach to analyzing collected data. Multiple data collection techniques assist in identifying themes, corroborating findings, and enhancing the validity of research (Raich, Müller, & Abfalter, 2014). Methodological triangulation is the process of introducing multiple data sources to provide a more in-depth understanding of the problem studied (Cleland, 2017). The use of within methodological triangulation supports implementing multiple data collection techniques to assist in providing a complete picture of the participant's experience (Eltantawy, Paulraj, Giunipero, Naslund, & Thute, 2015; Raich et al., 2014). I achieved methodological triangulation through multiple data sources. My data sources included participant interviews, field notes, and company documents.

Researchers employing qualitative methodology generate large amounts of textual data (Pierre & Jackson, 2014). Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing data, organizing content, and reporting the results of that data (Elo et al., 2014; Green, Inan, & Maushak, 2014). Collecting transcripts from semistructured interviews and company documents assists in providing an accurate picture of a participant's knowledge and perception of a phenomenon (Raich et al., 2014). I analyzed company human resource policies and position descriptions in conjunction with interview data. Human resource policies provide knowledge of the company and expectations of employees. After reviewing the position descriptions, I gained an understanding of the duties and responsibilities assigned to each position. Coupling a review of company documents and interview data provided a holistic view of the data analysis. Analyzing company documents in tandem with interview data improves validity (Eltantawy et al., 2015).

Qualitative researchers use NVivo to assist in the second phase of data analysis, which is organizing content (Gibbons & Ryan, 2015). NVivo is a recommended software for coding and extracting themes to answer the overarching research question (Ullström, Sachs, Hansson, Øvretveit, & Brommels, 2014). Codes created in NVivo are specific to emergent themes discovered during data analysis (Ullström et al., 2014). The analysis of documents and the notes from a reflective journal can lead to identifying additional themes or can support reoccurring themes (Gibbons, 2015). After reviewing each interview again, I created theme codes in NVivo based on common ideas or themes shared among the interview transcripts, company documents, and my journal notes.

Researchers consider the query function in NVivo software to be helpful for identifying patterns or ignoring themes (Woods et al., 2016). A researcher might have limited understanding of the data if the researcher does not preserve the integrity of the participants' experience during the analysis process (Irving et al., 2014). To preserve the integrity of data during analysis, I identified common perspectives or experiences and assigned a code to each similar perspective or experience. Coding is a system to identify themes and concepts through a comparison process (Ganapathy, 2016). I assigned codes to the common themes. I imported each interview transcript into NVivo and ran a word frequency query function in conjunction with codes I imported into NVivo to identify additional emergent themes. Emerging themes are the products of coding and analytical reflection of the data (Ganapathy, 2016). Researchers can export data analyzed in NVivo Version 10 software into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to organize themes and address threats to validity (Gibbons & Ryan, 2015). I exported all emergent themes into an Excel spreadsheet to organize major and subordinate themes.

In the final phase of data analysis, which was reporting the results of the data, participants had the opportunity to member-check collected data. After each interview, I summarized each participant's answers to each interview question to ensure accuracy. I provided the participants with a summarized copy of their interview via e-mail. In the e-mail, I asked them to review their transcript for accuracy and return any corrections to the interpreted data via e-mail within 5 days. After the participants provided corrections or comments to the summarized copy of the interview, I reviewed their feedback in conjunction with the interview recording and my field notes. If I agreed with the participant feedback, I incorporated the feedback where appropriate and thanked the participant for their participation. The benefit of the member-checking process is that all participants have the opportunity to verify and correct collected data through the end of data analysis (Chronister et al., 2014). The member-checking process ensures accuracy and the correct interpretation of transcribed data (Elo et at., 2014; Mueller & Buckley, 2014). While the process may be time consuming, the member-checking process improves the dependability of data (O'Mara et al., 2014; Mueller & Buckley, 2014). The member checking process continued until no new data surfaced and the members' assessments accurately reflected my interpretation of the collected data.

Key themes that emerged from the data correlated to scholarly literature on engaged employee behavior. Work environment and leadership are significant determinants of engaged employee behavior (Al Mehrzi & Singh, 2016). Chandani, Mehta, Mall and Khokhar (2016) found leaders might improve engagement by implementing strategies that support organizational culture and address concerns with job satisfaction. A direct relationship exists between job satisfaction and employee dedication (Vandenabeele, 2014). The data indicated which strategies were effective in improving employee engagement for increased productivity.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Establishing dependability and confirmability in qualitative research is analogous to establishing reliability in quantitative research (Hays, Wood, Dahl, & Kirk-Jenkins, 2016). Increased reliability eliminates bias and minimizes data inaccuracy (Yüksel, 2017). The ability to replicate results in other research increases reliability (Elo et al., 2014).

In qualitative research, participants answer questions relating to their experience with a phenomenon (van Wijngaarden, Leget, & Goossensen, 2015). Researchers may employ member checking as the quality control process to improve the accuracy and reliability of data (Chronister et al., 2014). In the member-checking process, participants verify the interpretation of data (Holden, Scott, Hoonakker, Hundt, & Carayon, 2015). Member checking may not be practical in research, as participants may not agree with the synthesized information produced after each interview. To mitigate inaccurate data, researchers can create a dialogue of back and forth conversation during semistructured interviews to seek confirmation or disconfirmation of interpreted data (Simpson & Quigley, 2016).

The dependability of research refers to data consistency under similar conditions (Elo et al., 2014). Employing superimposing methods, such as triangulation and establishing an audit trail, improves the rigor of research (Hadi & Closs, 2016). By concisely detailing criteria for participation, researchers establish dependability and create the conditions for the transferability of data (Elo et al., 2014). Triangulation assists in establishing the reliability of results (Ganapathy, 2016). Triangulation strategies include observation, interviews, and a review of documents to establish credibility and dependability data (Ang, Embi, & Yunus, 2016). I used my field notes, participant interviews, and company documents to conduct triangulation in this study.

Member checking improves the dependability of data. In the process of member checking, participants have the opportunity to corroborate findings by verifying the accuracy and interpretation of data (Elo et al., 2014; Mueller & Buckley, 2014). The member-checking process provides an opportunity for participants to either clarify responses or provide more data to increase the accuracy of the study findings (Harvey, 2015). The member-checking process decreases the possibility of errors in the data (Chronister et al., 2014). To perform the member-checking process, the participants verified my interpretation of the interview data. I summarized the answer to each interview question, and the participants had the opportunity to clarify or correct my interpretation of their answers through verbal feedback to improve data accuracy.

Validity

Validity refers to the durability of data and the degree to which the data are an accurate reflection of the phenomenon studied (Morse, 2015). Multiple data collection techniques assist in identifying themes, corroborating findings, and enhancing the validity of research (Raich et al. 2014). Researchers establish research validity when readers can competently follow the analysis and findings (Elo et al., 2014).

Establishing the credibility of data helps to ensure trustworthiness in research (Elo et al., 2014). Any threat to validity or credibility may damage the integrity of research

(Loffi & Wallace, 2014). Strategies to address the credibility or believability of findings include mitigating the occurrence of bias or an incorrect interpretation of data (Archibald, 2016; Leung, 2015). Any bias a researcher brings to a study due to expected outcomes is a threat to validity (Lewis, 2017). Selecting the most appropriate data collection technique is key to addressing credibility and increasing a researcher's confidence that the data collected addresses the aim of the study (Elo et al., 2014). Triangulating data enhances credibility (Birt et al., 2016). Member checking and describing experiences as the researcher strengthen credibility (Hanson, Craig, & Tong, 2017). Using documentation as an additional data source ensures the data gathered are complete (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). To increase the credibility of this study, I employed triangulation and member checking. To achieve credibility within this doctoral study, I triangulated data by conducting interviews, reviewing my field notes, and analyzing company documents. I also performed the member-checking process after each interview. The participants had an opportunity to clarify, verify, or expound on their initial answers. Triangulation and member checking assist in establishing the credibility or the truth and believability of the findings (Elo et al., 2014).

Researchers address confirmability by ensuring data are neutral and accurate (Elo et al., 2014; Hanson et al., 2017). In qualitative research, researchers should establish an audit trail for other researchers to follow to address transferability (Houghton et al., 2013). For this study, the audit trail consisted of (a) identifying the purpose for this doctoral study, (b) discussing why I chose a particular set of participants to participate, (c) describing data collection procedures, (d) describing data analysis techniques, (e) discussing data interpretation and findings, and (f) identifying techniques used to address reliability and validity (Baillie, 2015). Confirmability in research increases by using multiple sources of data (Aparicio et al., 2017). In addition to interviews, analyzing company documents increases confirmability (Thomas, 2015). I addressed confirmability by reviewing company documents, in addition to conducting interviews. Confirmability establishes objectivity in a study, where a study finding links back to the participant data and not to a researcher's assumptions (Houghton et al., 2013; Rapport, Clement, Doel, & Hutchings, 2015).

Qualitative researchers must correctly select the population and number of participants to establish reliability and credibility (Marks, 2015). Data saturation is contingent upon sample size, quantity of interviews, reliability, and analysis of data (Cleary et al., 2014). Data saturation transpires in research when themes no longer emerge from the data (Malterud et al., 2016). Researchers should further investigate additional themes identified during analysis by collecting additional data (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Tran et al., 2017). Data saturation occurred after six participant interviews.

Transition and Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore strategies business leaders in the hospitality industry employ to improve employee engagement for increased productivity. Section 2 included the purpose of this doctoral study, my role as the researcher, the criteria for participation, the chosen research methodology and design, data collection and analysis techniques, and methods to identify reliability and credibility. I used a purposeful sample of six leaders in the hospitality industry with at least 3 years of leadership experience and conducted semistructured interviews with each participant. After collecting data, I used NVivo software to conduct an analysis of the collected data. Section 3 includes the presentation of findings, applications for this study, implications for social change, and recommendations for further study.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

In Section 3, I present the findings and identify the emergent themes from data sources analyzed during the study. I reviewed the academic and professional literature to support the findings in this doctoral study. After completing the participant interviews and reviewing company documents, I discovered three major themes leaders employed to improve employee engagement: (a) communication, (b) rewards and recognition, and (c) work environment. The identified themes align with the conceptual framework and current research on strategies to improve employee engagement. I conclude Section 3 with (a) applications for professional practice, (b) implications for social change, (c) recommendations for action, and (d) recommendations for future research and conclusions.

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies business leaders used to improve employee engagement for increased productivity. I gathered data using a purposive sample of six leaders within the hospitality industry in South Korea with at least 3 years of experience who applied strategies to improve employee engagement for increased productivity. I reviewed position descriptions and company human resource policies to triangulate and confirm collected data. The findings of this doctoral study revealed communication, rewards and recognition, and work environment are themes from which hospitality leaders developed strategies to improve employee engagement toward increased productivity.

Presentation of the Findings

The intent of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies hospitality leaders use to improve employee engagement for increased productivity. The research question was as follows: What strategies do leaders use to improve employee engagement for increased productivity? Three themes emerged during analysis of data: (a) communication, (b) recognition and rewards, and (c) work environment. Each primary theme relates to Kahn's (1990) personal engagement theory.

Theme 1: Communication

Analysis of participant interviews and company documents revealed communication as the most prevalent strategy used to improve employee engagement to increase productivity. Communication between leaders and employees requires openness, transparency, and respect to improve employee engagement (Hart, 2016). Effective communication refers to the distribution and understanding of information between leaders and employees (Yap, Abdul-Rahman, & Chen, 2017). All participants agreed effective communication is the foundation to building employee engagement. Each participant asserted holding frequent and informal meetings with team members provided the opportunity for employees to speak openly or gain clarity on a task. Employees can ask questions and seek clarification when leaders allow the employees to speak openly (Ng et al., 2017). Participant P01 believed effective communication was key to ensuring each employee understood the company vision. Participant P02 shared that employees and leaders often participate in staff meetings on performance standards and ways to improve performance. Participant P03 stated his team communicated using email and group chats. According to Kim, Seo, and David (2015), people may view using digital media as less risky than face-to-face communication to build relationships. Although his employees preferred digital media as a means to communicate, Participant P03 stated face-to-face communication was the most effective way to communicate with team members to minimize miscommunication while allowing the opportunity to observe body language. Participant P03 replied, “I can gauge the level of understanding or dissatisfaction and address any concerns to prevent later issues.” When speaking with team members, eye contact shows attentiveness and understanding (Asan, Young, Chewning, & Montague, 2015). Participant P06 believed personal interactions with employees let them know the leader heard their concerns and that the leader valued the employees’ input. The benefits of communication include increased collaboration among team members, increased efficiency in operations, and overall success within the organization (Yap et al., 2017). Communication is a crucial element to improving employee engagement to increase employee productivity.

The participant interviews revealed three subordinate themes within the main theme of communication. The subordinate themes were feedback, building relationships, and clarifying expectations (see Table 2). These factors relate to effective communication between the leader and the employee as a key factor to improving employee engagement for increased productivity.

Table 2

Minor Themes: Communication

Participant	Theme	Frequency of Mention
P01, P02, P03, P04, P05, P06	Feedback	14
P01, P02, P03, P06	Building relationships	10
P02, P03, P04, P05	Clarifying expectations	8

Feedback. Timely feedback motivates employees to meet or exceed goals and may increase performance. All six participants indicated consistent feedback between leaders and their employees is crucial to improving employee engagement. Participant P01 noted employees want to hear candid developmental feedback on their performance from leaders within the organization. Jiang and Men (2015) posited open and honest feedback, whether praise or criticism, promotes employee engagement. Participant P03 noted his employees often receive praise for a job well done from both supervisors and peers. Leaders use informal praise to emphasize an employee's strengths and to motivate the employee to increase performance (Pulakos et al., 2015). Feedback improves employee engagement and increases employee productivity.

Participant P02 implemented an informal feedback system wherein team members often provided suggestions or praised the performance of others. Participant P02 noted the employees were nervous when asked to provide feedback, but subsequently developed communication habits to praise fellow employees. As a result of these new habits, employees often provide suggestions to improve work behavior. Informal feedback through impromptu conversations develop employees and correct undesired behavior (Lam, Peng, Wong, & Lau, 2017; Pulakos et al., 2015). Participant P04 stated that often his employees were more receptive to suggestions from peers on how to improve performance. Participant P04 elaborated that, when observed, employees interpreted peer-to-peer corrections as “teachable moments” instead of criticism. Informal feedback among peers provides direction for employees to enhance work performance and may correct undesired behavior.

Leaders provide formal feedback by using written periodic performance appraisals. Appraisals can be both evaluative and developmental (Kampkötter, 2017). Three participants provided quarterly evaluations, whereas the other three participants evaluated their employees annually. Appraisals serve as tools to communicate employee job performance and expectations. Participant P02 noted annual performance appraisals are a requirement for all employees. Participant P02 stated part of the evaluation process is a continued focus on performance measures, where employees can sustain performance, and areas the employee may improve in performance. Properly executed performance appraisals inform employees of their competency in job knowledge and of the skills and opportunities where the employee may require more development (Harrington & Lee, 2015). Performance appraisals build trust between a leader and an employee (Kim & Holzer, 2016). Performance appraisals serve as an instrument to foster open communication and trust between the leader and the employee.

Each participant viewed eliciting employee feedback on leader performance as a factor to increase employee engagement. Participant P01 believed allowing employees to evaluate his performance as a leader increased employee engagement. Participant P04 encourages employees to provide feedback on leadership performance. Participant P04 stated, “Giving employees a voice allows them to identify areas of improvement.” Participant P06 shared, “One of my employees thought I was unapproachable. I explained to the employee that I may be distracted with business operations.” Participant P06 noted the conversation led him to improve his ability to communicate effectively and he now continually elicits feedback from employees in an effort to improve his performance as a leader. Employee feedback may provide alternative perspectives on leader performance (Goldring, Cravens, Porter, Murphy, & Elliott, 2015). Participant P02 indicated the leaders must be approachable for employees to voice concerns or vent frustrations. Leaders soliciting performance feedback from employees empower their employees as stakeholders in the organization to improve performance and organizational operations.

Engaged employees may provide feedback to increase work productivity. Participant P02 shared that employees are inventive and constantly provide feedback to improve operations. Participant P02 stated her employees implemented a process, decreasing production time by 50%. Participant P01 stated employees are key to improving operations because employees work with the systems and understand what elements require improvement. Choi et al. (2015) found work productivity increases when employees are free to suggest improvements in operations. Participant P03 could gauge the level of commitment exhibited by employees from their ability to provide solutions to improve production. By creating an attachment to the work environment, engaged employees contribute to increasing productivity (Andersson, 2015). Employee engagement increases with an employee’s ability to provide feedback on improving operations, which in turn enhances productivity.

Psychological safety is one of three psychological conditions that influence work engagement. Kahn (1990) posited leaders who create a positive work environment increase psychological safety for employees. Employees experience psychological safety when all team members believe there is a shared and established trust and mutual respect for each team member (Koopmann, Lanai, Wang, Zhou, & Shi, 2016). Participant P06 shared a story in which two employees bullied another employee. The employee shared his concerns with Participant P06 about the other team members, but the employee did not want Participant P06 to chastise the other employees. Although Participant P06 believed the situation caused the employee emotional strain, Participant P06 promised not to directly approach the other employees concerning the bullying incidents. Keeping his word, Participant P06 did not chastise the team members but took a different approach and posed a question to his employees on their group chat about trust and how to establish trust among team members. As the employees shared their thoughts, it became apparent the employees understood trust and respect were imperative to establishing a team. Participant P06 reported the bullying stopped, and the bullied employee's productivity improved, which resulted in a pay raise. Employee engagement and productivity improve when employees experience psychological safety in the work environment.

Building relationships. Sixty percent of the participants viewed building relationships as essential to improving employee engagement to increase productivity. Building relationships is a key component of the leader–member exchange (LMX) theory (Riggs & Porter, 2017). Using the LMX theory as the foundation for building employee relationships, leaders increase communication and trust through frequent interactions (Maslyn, Schyns, & Farmer, 2017). Participant P06 stated, “Daily communication within the team is really all it takes to increase productivity.” Increased communication between a leader and employees develops an interrelationship through the three stages of stranger, acquaintance, and partner to create a psychological attachment for employees (Maslyn et al., 2017). The LMX theory is the framework for developing relationships through personal interactions with employees to improve employee engagement.

Participant P02 asserted a leader has a responsibility to form a trust relationship with each employee and noted that trust relationship filters through the team, building the team dynamic. Leaders employing a hands-on leadership approach steer teams to build interpersonal relationships and increase trust among the team (Koopmann et al., 2016). Participant P02 indicated establishing interrelationships through treating employees like family is key to engagement. Participant P01 witnessed several instances in which team members continually assisted one another without requests for help. Participant P01 stated, “Even during lunch, the team prefers to sit together. I cannot recall a time, other than an appointment, where my team members did not sit together. We are a family.” According to Taneja et al. (2015), employees identify with work roles when strong relationships are present among team members and leaders in an organization. Strong interpersonal relationships build trust between team members and leaders, increase commitment, and improve employee engagement.

Participant P03 related a contrasting view on interpersonal relationships with team members. Participant P03 noted employees within a team should create relationships among themselves, while he preferred to keep some distance between his employees to allow the employees' immediate supervisor or team leader to interact with the employees more. The quality of relationships developed between immediate supervisors and employees have a direct effect on employee performance and engagement (Martin, Guillaume, Thomas, Lee, & Epitropaki, 2016). Participant P03 considers his employees engaged in the work environment because he encourages immediate supervisors or team leaders to develop relationships with the team members. Participant P03 develops relationships with his team leaders through weekly training events. His belief aligns with Martin et al. (2016), who found leaders exercising high levels of LMX create personal relationships with employees to enhance employee job satisfaction and commitment.

Participant P01 believed employees value a leader simply asking employees, "How is your day?" Leaders establish interpersonal relationships through consistent interactions with employees (Downey et al., 2015). Participant P02 stated leaders in the organization should make it a priority to know personal information, such as family member names, birthdays, and hobbies, to initiate meaningful contact with each employee. Employee engagement improves when leaders establish interpersonal relationships with their employees (Osborne & Hammond, 2017). Interpersonal relationships with employees create opportunities to mentor employees to improve performance (Ferinia, Yuniarsi, & Disman, 2016). However, leaders should establish quality interpersonal relationships equally among employees. Employees perceiving preferential treatment to specific employees may display undesired behaviors or begin to take part in social comparisons, which may lead to increased turnover (Seo, Nahrgang, Carter, & Hom, 2017). Leaders who establish positive relationships with employees create a distinct path to improving performance and increasing employee commitment to the organization.

Clarifying role expectations. Leaders who set attainable goals for employees motivate employees to improve performance. The key to setting attainable goals is to clarify role expectations (Pulakos et al., 2015). Role expectations are perceptions concerning the duties and responsibilities associated with a role within an organization and may shape individual employees' role behavior in an organization (Qu, Janssen, & Shi, 2015). Participant P03 stated, "From the very beginning, I sit new hires down and explain my expectations of their performance; if you don't set expectations early, from the very beginning, employees may follow their own rhythm or take liberties." Clarifying role expectations requires a leader to set SMART goals. SMART goals are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely (Pulakos et al., 2015). After a leader clarifies expectations, employees may then work to achieve specific job performance measures.

Clear role descriptions or job descriptions that define duties and responsibilities assist both the leader and the employee. Job descriptions are inclusive explanations of the responsibilities of a particular position within an organization (Carliner et al., 2015). Clear role descriptions provide employees with an understanding of critical responsibilities inherent to their job role in an organization. Participant P02 believed it is important to clarify the role expectations of employees immediately after hiring. Participant P02 asserted the best way to clarify role expectations with employees is to review the assigned position description with the employee during new hire orientation.

Leaders assist employees in understanding how assigned responsibilities support organizational goals (Pulakos et al., 2015). Job descriptions provide distinct objectives and duties to establish an employee performance plan and to evaluate job performance (Carliner et al., 2015). A review of internal position descriptions for each organization assisted in understanding how the leader and the employee reached mutual agreements concerning job responsibilities and performance expectations. Each position description detailed the employee's duties and priorities for specific tasks and defined standards for evaluation. Role descriptions provide a foundation for expectations and development for career progression (Pulakos et al., 2015). Employees and leaders may review job descriptions to determine whether employees perform job objectives to standard and identify areas of improvement.

Leaders should display a working knowledge of performance measures and effectively communicate work objectives to motivate employees in support of organizational goals. Without clearly defined performance measures, employees may place a higher priority on tasks that may adversely affect performance and thus decrease productivity (Ho, Wu, & Wu, 2014). Leaders use performance measures to monitor employee performance and to identify deviations from predetermined performance standards (Carliner et al, 2015). Employees who understand performance measures feel motivated and work to achieve performance and organizational goals (Ho et al., 2014). Performance measures align leaders and employees, incentivizing them to achieve organizational goals and improve productivity.

Leaders should seek balance in outlining expectations while affording employees some autonomy to provide and determine priorities of work. Employees experience autonomy in the work environment when leaders provide flexibility to self-govern how and when to perform specific tasks (Victor & Hoole, 2017). Participant P03 believed providing his employees' autonomy at work to make specific decisions, such as offering a free bottle of wine to a dissatisfied customer, gave the employees some ownership in the organization. Employees exercise initiative and take ownership of assigned tasks when they understand their individual job expectations (Li et al., 2016). Employees with job autonomy use accrued knowledge and expertise to solve problems.

Leaders play a significant role in developing employee autonomy. Leaders develop autonomy in employees through offering opportunities to provide suggestions and acknowledging employee viewpoints, encouraging employees to take initiative, communicating informally with employees, and avoiding the use of the transactional leadership style to motivate employees (Slemp, Kern, Patrick, & Ryan, 2018). Participant P03 stated as employees become more comfortable in their duties, they gain more autonomy, and the employees realize autonomy occurs as recognition for hard work. Highly autonomous work environments increase employee job satisfaction, performance, and commitment to the organization (Alegre, Mas-Machuca, & Berbegal-Mirabent, 2016; Jacobs, Renard, & Snelgar, 2014). Participant P04 stated, "Once employees exhibit initiative and the ability to accomplish assigned tasks in a timely manner, I meet with them weekly and we collectively set new goals." Employees experiencing autonomy are more likely to meet established goals and are less likely to consider seeking employment elsewhere.

Leaders and employees must share expectations of one another. While setting achievable goals, leaders must also balance expectations and job demands against employee burnout (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Participant P05 shared the following:

> I recently had an employee that, while she had the drive to accomplish tasks, she could never finish tasks in a timely fashion. She began to exhibit signs of burnout. It was clear that if I didn't intervene, the situation would continue to worsen. I met with her and we talked about the duties of her position. We outlined realistic goals and redefined her priority of work. She is now meeting the expectations and, in some cases, exceeds them.

Employee engagement continues to improve when leaders realize that employees have personal and professional expectations of their leaders and the organization. Employees place organizational goals as a priority when leaders meet or exceed expectations (Vroom, 1964). Setting expectations and providing prompt feedback improve employee performance and engagement to increase workplace productivity (Pulakos et al., 2015).

The participants in this study identified feedback, building relationships, and setting expectations as key to effective communication in their organizations. Effective communication is crucial to improving employee engagement for increased productivity. Internal effective communication between leaders and employees assists employees in understanding the roles and objectives within an organization. Leaders who communicate effectively enable employees to align values and goals to improve engagement for increased productivity (Karanges, Johnston, Beatson, & Lings, 2015). The findings of this study revealed leaders who promoted open and clear lines of communication increased employee engagement and productivity.

Theme 2: Recognition and Rewards

Implementing a recognition and rewards system based on performance improves employee engagement. Rewards are both intrinsic and extrinsic. Both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards influence employee effectiveness and productivity (Ajmal, Bashir, Abrar, Khan, & Saqib, 2015). Intrinsic rewards are intangible and include a focus on developmental opportunities, a sense of pride, status within an organization, recognition, autonomy, and increased responsibility (Hoole & Hotz, 2016). Extrinsic rewards include monetary incentives such as increases in pay, promotions, or bonuses (Victor & Hoole, 2017). Leaders may employ intrinsic or extrinsic rewards, or a combination of both, to reward an employee’s performance.

All six participants employed a performance-based rewards system to improve engagement for increased productivity. Participant P06 noted a performance reward system improved employee performance, often created healthy competition among the team, and led to an increase in productivity. Employees motivated by extrinsic rewards seek some form of incentive, such as a pay raise or promotion. Vroom (1964) asserted that extrinsic rewards motivate employees because employees believe leaders can use extrinsic rewards to secure items of value, such as food or vacations. Organizations in which bonuses have ties to performance provide motivation for employees to perform because the basis of the incentive is completing specific tasks to standard or exceeding the standard (Shaw & Gupta, 2015). Participant P02 noted the current extrinsic reward system used within the organization increased employee engagement and stated, “Each Saturday, we set a sales goal. Prior to beginning their shift, I share the sales goal with all employees. The employee reaching the goal for the night receives a 100,000W [US$90] cash tip. The incentive motivates employees to remain engaged throughout their shift.” Extrinsic rewards motivate employees to maintain or improve performance in the work environment, thereby increasing employee engagement.

Performance appraisal systems should be fair to improve employee engagement. Performance appraisals are formal instruments leaders use to evaluate employee performance (Harbi, Thursfield, & Bright, 2017). Employee engagement increases when employees receive equal treatment and receive rewards equally based on performance. Employees believe appraisal systems are assets in determining strengths and areas of improvement. Participant P03 stated reliable employees in the organization are eager to receive annual evaluations on performance. Participant P04 believed employees value the organization’s appraisal system because it is an opportunity to set tangible goals to achieve for the next evaluation period. According to McDaniel et al. (2015), there is a direct correlation between performance appraisals and employee engagement. Engaged employees appreciate performance appraisals as an opportunity to receive praise while obtaining feedback on areas to improve for future evaluations (Bin, 2015; Yoerger, 2015). Leaders may provide rewards in conjunction with a performance appraisal system to increase employee engagement.

Rewards and recognition systems establish psychological connection for employees. Kahn (1990) noted engaged employees must experience a psychological connection to work. Fair and impartial reward systems show appreciation for employee performance (Taneja et al., 2015). Rewards, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, improve employee work engagement and increase productivity (Victor & Hoole, 2017). Rewards for work performance are a psychological benefit for employees and a tool that leaders may use to improve employee engagement.

Theme 3: Work Environment

Hospitality employees are vulnerable to negative outcomes associated with emotionally turbulent situations in the workplace. Mental and physical occupational stressors may affect the work engagement of hospitality industry employees (Karatepe & Karadas, 2015). Creating positive work environments improves employee engagement by fostering physical, cultural, and psychological conditions that may affect the well-being of each employee (Nayak & Sahoo, 2015). According to Kahn (1990), employee engagement is higher in psychologically safe work environments. Psychological safety is a key factor in creating a positive work environment (Lee & Ok, 2015). Employees feel psychologically safe when they believe that leaders in the organization provide a harmonious work environment and care for their well-being. Leaders who foster a positive work environment by creating psychologically safe conditions may improve employee engagement.

Cultural diversity is a moderator for team psychological safety. Cultural diversity refers to demographic differences between groups of two or more people (Velten &

Lashley, 2017). Cultural diversity includes differences in race, gender, or other noticeable characteristics (Velten & Lashley, 2017). Cultural diversity can increase employee motivation and productivity (Lozano & Escrich, 2017). Leaders who ignore cultural diversity in the workplace may negatively affect employee engagement. Cultural diversity programs in the workplace signal to employees that the leaders care about their well-being and psychological safety (Downey et al., 2015). Participant P06 stated that his staff was culturally diverse, and cultural diversity causes concerns with scheduling, particularly on the weekends, and was beginning to cause a rift in his team. Rather than ignore the cultural differences among his employees, he implemented cultural training during weekly training events. As the employees gained knowledge of their peers' cultural differences, they began to embrace the differences rather than reject them. Leaders assisting their team members to understand cultural diversity create psychological safety in the work environment.

Positive interpersonal relationships in the workplace improve employee well-being and provide psychological safety to employees. Developing interpersonal relationships with coworkers is a factor of improving employee engagement (Anitha, 2014). Healthy interpersonal relationships within an organization create a positive work environment (Havens, Gittell, & Vasey, 2018). On the contrary, acts of workplace incivility have negative psychological effects and can result from a single individual within the organization (Hershcovis, Ogunfowora, Reich, & Christie, 2017). Schilpzand, De Pater, and Erez (2016) defined workplace incivility as covert acts committed in the work environment with the intent to do harm to another individual. Participant P03 shared an instance of workplace incivility that affected the entire team:

> We had an employee who exhibited toxic characteristics. He often berated his fellow employees and made fun of their inexperience. His presence affected the entire team and we noticed some employees would call in sick to avoid working with him or remain in a different area to diminish the chance of interactions with this particular employee. After speaking with him repeatedly and documenting those instances, his behavior did not improve. I decreased his work hours in an effort to get his attention. After an incident in which one of my other employees threatened to quit, I made the decision to terminate him. It took some time but the absence of that particular employee, but there was a noticeable difference in engagement and productivity without the employee present in the organization.

Creating a positive work environment is key to employees experiencing psychological safety in the workplace. A barrier to psychological safety is workplace incivility. The effects of incivility in the workplace include emotional labor, increased stress, decreased job satisfaction, turnover intentions, and decreased work engagement (Schilpzand et al., 2016). Team building is one way of creating a positive work environment. The purpose of team building is to assist employees in improving engagement by working together to increase productivity or resolve problems as they arise (Sguera, Bagozzi, Huy, Boss & Boss, 2016). When incorporated properly, team-building techniques may reduce the side effects of workplace incivility and assist in creating a dialogue to report instances of incivility to create a psychologically safe work environment.

Trust is another concept that leaders may institute to create a psychologically safe work environment. Five of the six respondents believed trust was a factor in improving employee engagement. Participant P04 mentioned trust was a key driver of employee engagement. Participants P02 and P03 noted the importance of supervisors earning the trust of each employee. According to Newman, Donohue, and Eva (2017), employees experience psychological safety when there is some measure of trust in their leader. Leaders gain the trust of their employees by establishing a rapport and expressing empathy (Ferinia et al., 2016). High levels of trust between a leader and an employee may lead to improved performance and the ability to comfortably share ideas with the leader and team members (Newman et al., 2017). Leaders building a relationship of trust with their employees increase psychological safety.

Conclusion

The findings aligned with the conceptual framework of this doctoral study, which was Kahn's (1990) personal engagement theory. The three emergent themes derived from data analysis, which were communication, recognition and rewards, and work environment, contribute to understanding strategies to improve employee engagement for increased productivity. The participants successfully employed the identified themes to improve employee engagement in their organizations and reaped the benefits of increased productivity, decreased attrition, and increased profits.

Applications to Professional Practice

This body of research is applicable to professional practice because it includes proven strategies to improve employee engagement for increased productivity. Leaders who understand and implement the strategies may improve engagement in the work environment. Organizations whose leaders invest resources to improve employee engagement remain sustainable due to high levels of employee engagement (Carasco-Saul et al., 2015; Tracey et al., 2015). The findings of this doctoral study are consistent with Kahn's (1990) personal engagement theory and contribute to the existing body of knowledge and research on employee engagement.

The first theme, communication, leads to a strategy leaders may employ to improve employee engagement. Leaders may use communication as a technique to guide employees to improve work performance (Mikkelson, York, & Arritola, 2015). Under communication, the participants identified three subordinate themes: (a) feedback, (b) building relationships, and (c) clarifying expectations. Leaders providing consistent and honest feedback improve employee engagement. Feedback may be either formal or informal. Employees may receive informal feedback to correct undesired behavior or formal feedback through performance appraisals. Employees should have the opportunity to provide feedback to both supervisors and peers. Eliciting feedback from employees may improve processes and systems within the organization, as well as provide suggestions on improving leader performance.

Interpersonal relationships improve employee engagement. Employees who identify with work roles feel more engaged than employees who may feel isolated in the work environment. Interpersonal relationships in the workplace are the foundation of trust. Leaders build interpersonal relationships through consistent and meaningful interaction with employees.

One important key to communication is clarifying expectations. Clear expectations assist employees with achieving attainable goals. Meeting or exceeding goals motivates employees to improve work performance and thereby increases employee productivity and engagement. Defining role descriptions is another method by which leaders can improve employee engagement. Clear role descriptions ensure employees understand critical responsibilities in supporting an organization's mission. Leaders should seek a balance between outlining expectations while providing employee autonomy and the ability to prioritize assigned tasks.

The participants in this study also identified recognition and rewards as tool to improve employee engagement. Rewards may be tangible or intangible. Tangible rewards include bonuses or promotions, and intangible or intrinsic rewards instill pride and often provide developmental opportunities for employees. Employees may view rewards and recognition as positive experiences in the workplace. Viewing rewards and recognition as a positive work experience may create a psychological connection for employees. Employees who establish psychological connections increase productivity and improve employee engagement.

The final factor to improve employee engagement was the work environment. Frontline employees within the hospitality industry experience physical and mental stressors. Leaders creating a positive work environment provide physical, cultural, and psychological conditions to improve employee engagement. Employees require psychological safety in the workplace (Newman et al., 2017). Psychologically safe work environments are free of work incivility. Kahn (1990) posited the three psychological conditions of availability, meaningfulness, and safety influenced work engagement. Employees experiencing psychological safety learn from mistakes and consistently seek to improve work performance (Murphy & Kiffin-Petersen, 2017). Employees increase engagement when leaders address threats to psychological safety, and positive work environments are a driver of employee engagement.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for social change include the potential to decrease stress levels in the workplace and improve professional and personal relationships. Hospitality industry employees experience instances of job burnout, absenteeism, and turnover intentions (Shaukat et al., 2017). Duff et al. (2015) posited that employees conform to absenteeism and turnover behavior as a coping mechanism for stress. Continued exposure to stressful conditions in the work environment may increase instances of health problems, such as high blood pressure, heart disease, and some mental health problems (Bergström et al., 2017; Wang, Hernandez, Newman, He, & Bian, 2016). Health problems that increase due to stress contribute to higher health costs, decreased profitability, and diminished participation in community and social programs (Wang et al., 2016). Implementing the identified strategies may increase job satisfaction and decrease employee turnover. Decreasing stress levels in the work environment benefits the organization, the community, and the employee.

Leaders applying the themes identified in this doctoral study may foster a psychologically safe work environment free from workplace incivility. Workplace incivility is a threat to psychological safety (Schilpzand et al., 2016). Employees may see instances of unresolved workplace incivility as a perceived norm (Tankard & Paluck, 2016), and leaders may implement social learning to change a negative perceived norm into an acceptable social behavior and to improve psychological safety (Walumbwa et al., 2017). Employees feel psychologically safe when leaders decrease instances of workplace incivility. Psychological safety enhances employee engagement, which in turn influences altruism to support charitable programs within the local community (Gill, 2015). Psychological safety in the work environment is crucial to building a foundation of moral and ethical behavior (Murphy & Kiffin-Petersen, 2017). Psychological safety in the workplace promotes socially positive norms that encourage positive change in how employees interact with their leaders and their peers.

Profitability and sustainability have a link to employee engagement. Educating organizational leaders on strategies to improve employee engagement may increase profitability and create a desire to improve the community surrounding the organization (Breevaart et al., 2014; Loosemore & Lim, 2017). Engaged employees create robust organizations that lead to shared community interest and increased civic engagement (Loosemore & Lim, 2017). Engaged employees also go beyond job duties and support organizational goals in social responsibility efforts, such as volunteer programs and ethical business practices (Besieux, Baillien, Verbeke, & Euwema, 2018). Organizations who exercise corporate social responsibility invigorate the community by creating job opportunities while increasing profits and sustainability.

Recommendations for Action

Synthesizing the prevalent themes from the participant interviews led to three recommendations for supervisors to improve employee engagement for increased productivity. The first recommendation is for leaders to communicate effectively. Effective communication includes feedback from leader to employee and vice versa, building interpersonal relationships, and clarifying expectations. Effective communication is a critical factor in successful organizations. The second recommendation is to implement a reward and recognition system as a driver to increase employee engagement. The final recommendation is to create a positive work environment. Employees thrive in a psychologically safe environment by building trust relationships and implementing cultural diversity through educational programs. Leaders should also address any instances of incivility and create training opportunities to prevent future instances.

The emergent themes align with previous research. Although immediate supervisors are primarily responsible for building employee engagement, this study may assist management at all levels to improve employee engagement. I will share my findings with the participants of this doctoral study. In addition, I will seek alternate venues to disseminate the findings, including conferences and other professional development opportunities and team-building events. Organizational leaders who implement the themes identified in this study may help to increase employee engagement and improve employee productivity.

Recommendations for Further Research

Recommendations for further research include conducting a study in larger organizations and increasing the sample size. The population size was a primary limitation for this qualitative multiple case study. Another limitation of this study was leader bias based on personal perceptions and overconfidence in leadership ability. Leaders may perceive their leadership style and experience as competent, but employees' opinion may differ. A researcher who conducts a study with a larger sample that includes employees may address leader bias. The availability of leaders in the hospitality industry due to an assiduous work schedule was another limitation. Identifying potential candidates to participate in a doctoral study can be tedious process. Larger samples may increase the breadth of experience among leaders regarding their strategies to improve employee engagement. An additional recommendation is to apply phenomenology as an alternative research design. The use of a phenomenological approach may expose more comprehensive details of the participants' lived experiences and add broader context to the body of knowledge in understanding strategies to improve employee engagement for increased productivity.

Reflections

My previous experience as a researcher was limited to educational papers and work projects. Compared to the culminating project I completed for the master's degree, this doctoral study was more extensive and time consuming. I also had preconceived expectations about the interview process and the collection of data. I thought finding qualified participants would be a straightforward procedure, but the process was challenging. I contacted hospitality professionals on LinkedIn and posted on Call for Participants message board. Both approaches to discovering participants for this doctoral study were futile. I eventually submitted a request to change the location of my study through the Institutional Review Board and received approval. Through physical and face-to-face communication, I found participants who were leaders in hospitality establishments to participate in this study.

After I found participants, setting up the interviews was the next challenge. Although each participant was willing to accommodate a schedule in which I was able to move seamlessly from one establishment to another, there was approximately 6 hours of travel involved to conduct all six interviews. Each participant was eager to share experiences with employee engagement. At times, I felt as if the participants’ eagerness overpowered my ability to keep their focus on answering the research questions. I relied on the interview protocol (see Appendix) to ensure consistency throughout the interviews. Each participant responded to the interview questions and remained engaged throughout the interview process. I recorded each interview using a digital recorder and used NVivo software to code and analyze the collected data. Although I watched several how-to videos on YouTube to learn how to use NVivo properly, the software was still challenging.

I was not surprised by the findings of this doctoral study. The participants identified several themes that aligned with published literature and with previous concepts learned in professional development courses I had attended throughout my career. Conducting this study was a reminder for me, as a leader, that the most important resource in an organization is people. As such, it was a reminder that leaders should use the identified themes when interacting with subordinates to improve employee engagement.

Summary and Study Conclusions

This doctoral study adds to the literature on strategies hospitality leaders use to improve employee engagement for increased productivity. Employee engagement is a motivational concept in which employees experience a physical, cognitive, or emotional connection to work and coworkers (Chen & Huang, 2016). The participants of this study identified communication, rewards and recognition, and work environment as strategies to improve employee engagement for increased productivity. Effective communication is a key element of employee engagement. Leaders who communicate effectively create an environment for employees to speak openly and seek clarity concerning job roles. Effective communication is key to ensuring employees understand an organization’s mission (Karanges et al., 2015). Organizations benefit from leaders fostering a work environment in which employees commit to the organization’s mission and vision. Effective communication between leaders and employees improves employee engagement for increased productivity.

Rewards and recognition programs are drivers for employee performance to increase productivity. Leaders use rewards and recognition programs to create a psychological attachment to work for employees and to improve employee engagement

(Kahn, 1990). Rewards, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, motivate employees to improve performance. Performance appraisal systems provide leaders with a formal process to provide feedback and praise for work performance (Taneja et al., 2015; Victor & Hoole, 2017). Leaders increase employee performance through rewards and recognition, and organizational leaders rely on their employees' performance to maintain sustainability and profitability.

Leaders who create a positive work environment improve employee engagement. Psychological safety is a factor of creating a positive work environment (Nayak & Sahoo, 2015). Organizational leaders implementing cultural diversity programs improve employees' psychological safety. Developing trust relationships with employees is another element to address when creating a psychologically safe work environment. When psychological needs are met in the workplace, employee engagement increases. Leaders provide opportunities for employees to improve engagement for increased productivity, and leaders require training on how to communicate goals, implement reward and recognition programs, and create a work environment free of incivility. Implementing training program may increase organizational success.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Interview Title: Strategies to Address Employee Disengagement

1. The interview session will commence with greetings and introductions.
2. The study participants will have previously read the informed consent form and provided their consent via e-mail, agreeing to participate in the research. I will thank the participant for their agreement to participate in the research study. I will also provide information regarding the member checking process that will follow the transcription and interpretation of the data. Following transcript interpretation, I will schedule time with the interview participants for member checking procedures to assist with ensuring the reliability and validity of the data.
3. The participant will be given a hard copy print out of the informed consent letter for their records.
4. I will turn on the audio recorder and I will note the date, time, and location.
5. I will indicate the coded sequential representation of the participant’s name e.g., ‘respondent R01’ on the audio recording, documented on my copy of the consent form and the interview will begin.
6. Each participant will be given the required time to fully answer each pre-determined interview question in detail (including any additional follow-up/probing questions).

At the close of the interview, I will thank each research participant for their time and participation in the study.