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Leadership Strategies for Improving Employee Engagement in the Information Technology Industry

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Geneva L. Reed

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Walden University
2019

Abstract

Leadership Strategies for Improving Employee Engagement in the Information
Technology Industry

by

Geneva L. Reed

MA, Lewis University, 2012

MPM, Keller Graduate School of Management, 2003

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

June 2019

Abstract

Disengaged employees in the information technology industry lead to decreased productivity, increased absenteeism, poor job performance, higher employee turnover, and reduced organizational effectiveness. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the leadership strategies that information technology leaders used to improve employee engagement. The transformational leadership theory was the conceptual framework for this study. Data were collected through semistructured interviews with 3 leaders of information technology companies in Illinois and a review of company documents. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis and using Yin's 5-step process of compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding data. The 3 emergent themes from data analysis were compensation and benefits strategy, performance management strategy, and recognition strategy. The findings of this research study indicated that compensation and benefits, performance management, and recognition were critical strategies information technology leaders used to improve employee engagement. The findings and recommendations resulting from this study might be valuable to information technology leaders, human resources managers, and hiring managers for developing leadership strategies to increase productivity, lower absenteeism, improve organizational performance, and reduce employee turnover through improved employee engagement. The implications for positive social change include the potential for information technology leaders to enhance local economic stability, lower local unemployment rates, and increase community volunteerism through improved employee engagement.

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Dedication

“Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion for reaching for the stars to change the world.” Harriet Tubman. I dedicate my Doctor of Business Administration degree to anyone who dares to dream, pursues their dreams, and achieves their dreams, as long as you live, it is never too late.

I dedicate my doctoral research to my very young nieces and nephew to inspire you to dream big and reach for the stars. Alexis Reed (niece), Aaliyah Reed (niece), Arriel Reed (niece), and Alijah Reed (nephew) always dream big, show compassion, and never, ever, quit. If I can do this, so can each of you. Always remember that I love you more than words could ever express, and I pray your “TT” has made you proud.

I dedicate my doctoral research to Freddie Mae Leverston Thomas (grandmother), Andrew Thomas (grandfather), Marie Reed (mother), General L. Reed (father), Roosetta Reed (sister), Reco Reed (brother), John Reed (uncle), and Dr. Thomas Smith (cousin) for loving me in spite of me, for cheering me on, and for giving me a reason to succeed.

I dedicate my doctoral study to childhood friends and educators who first taught me how to dream, Rodney Blisset, Lucy Blue, Wanda Christian, Loria Dennard, Dorothy Grant-Bryant, Paulette Howard, Ned L. McCray, Maurice “Smitty” Smith, Mary Stringer, Patrick Tracy, and Felicia Whitney. Lastly, to all of the culinary arts students past, present, and future at Neal F. Simeon high school, my desire for you, is to dare you to dream in spite of your circumstances. To all of you, my dream of becoming Dr. Geneva L. Reed came true because of you. I love each of you very much.

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“For with God nothing shall be impossible” (Luke 1:37, King James Version).

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Chalker and Loosemore (2016) noted that substantial evidence exists to indicate that high levels of trust influences productivity and high levels of trust influences high engagement. Trust involves good communication, transparency, empowerment of employees, high engagement, and high productivity (Chalker & Loosemore, 2016). Leaders could gain insight from new research related to trust in leadership and employee commitment to do a better job in engaging their workforce (Chalker & Loosemore, 2016). Business owners need skilled, competent, and engaged employees to improve their competitiveness (Mehta, 2015). Highly engaged employees contribute to the organization's productivity and competitiveness through participation and leadership (Mehta, Chandanl, Moksha, & Parul, 2016). Prior research by Pinto (2011) indicated that leaders remain accountable to the degree in which they motivate employees and ensure job satisfaction.

Background of the Problem

Information technology (IT) has a significant effect on an organization's finances, innovation, operational success, and competitive advantage (Sangari & Razmi, 2015). Human capital trends around the world indicate that organizational leaders and leaders in IT are not always successful engaging their workforce though leaders recognize that the wealth of information and knowledge in IT can create a competitive advantage (Sangari & Razmi, 2015). Hoole and Hotz (2016) noted a worldwide downward spiral of employee engagement, and organizational leaders must work to address the issue and attract the best talent to keep employees engaged. Kocakulah, Kelley, Mitchell, and

Ruggieri (2016) noted that low employee engagement could have an impact on performance and productivity. Corporate leaders focus on drivers such as sustainability, surviving economic conditions, maintaining a competitive edge, and establishing employees as a strategic partnership. The lack of leadership skills in the IT industry leads to low employee engagement (Stander, de Beer, & Stander, 2015). Approximately 2.8 million workdays are lost each year as a result of employee absences related to low engagement, which can affect the organization's profit and loss statement (Kocakulah et al., 2016).

Chalker and Loosemore (2016) posited that the concept of improving employee engagement to increase organizational effectiveness needs further research. Effective leaders seek high levels of trust to promote employee productivity and engagement (Chalker & Loosemore, 2016). Corporate leaders do not realize high levels of trust and productivity when employee engagement is low (Kang & Sung, 2017). As the complexity within organizations grows, the leader must find strategies to manage the forces that drive employee motivation, trust, and high-engagement in their organizations (Kang & Sung, 2017). Trust involves good communication, transparency, empowerment of employees, high engagement, and high productivity. High engagement employees can contribute to the organization's productivity and competitiveness through participation and leadership (Radda, Majidadi, & Akanno, 2015). Engagement relates to existing organizational constructs and leaders must find meaningful ways to create a work atmosphere that acts as a stimulant to drive employee engagement to ensure high performance and productivity to gain a competitive advantage (Radda et al., 2015).

Problem Statement

Disengaged employees lead to decreased productivity, absenteeism, poor job performance, turnover, and reduced organizational effectiveness (Chalker & Loosemore, 2016). Twenty-five percent of IT workers rank low or very low in employee engagement, with only 2% ranking as highly engaged in their jobs (Bhuvanaiah & Raya, 2016). The general business problem was disengaged employees in the IT industry cause decreased profitability. The specific business problem was that some IT leaders lack strategies to improve employee engagement.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies IT leaders use to improve employee engagement. The targeted population consisted of IT leaders in three technology companies in Chicago, Illinois, who have successfully implemented strategies to improve employee engagement. The implications for positive social change include the potential to improve employee engagement that may result in workers who are more creative and productive in their personal lives outside of the workplace. Engaged employees enjoy higher levels of job and personal satisfaction, experience less turnover and absenteeism, and lead lives that are more productive outside of the workplace than disengaged workers (Leary et al., 2013). Increased employee engagement might result in improved local economic stability, lower local unemployment rates, and increased community volunteerism. Engaged employees tend to volunteer more time and resources for community service projects than disengaged employees (Krasnopolskaya, Roza, & Meijs, 2015).

Nature of the Study

The three research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Long, 2014). Qualitative researchers seek to gain insight and discover a deeper meaning of a phenomenon (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014). I selected the qualitative method to gain insight and discover the deeper meaning of a phenomenon. Quantitative researchers use statistical analysis of numeric data to test hypotheses for relationships among variables (Hoe & Hoare, 2012). A mixed method study includes a qualitative and quantitative element (Goldman et al., 2015). I did not test hypotheses for relationships or differences among variables that are part of a quantitative study or the quantitative portion of a mixed method study. Therefore, neither the quantitative nor the mixed method approach was appropriate for this study.

I considered four research designs: (a) phenomenology, (b) ethnography, (c) narrative inquiry, and (d) case study. Phenomenological researchers study the human experience from the view of those people living the phenomenon (Ezeobele, Malecha, Mock, Mackey-Godine, & Hughes, 2014). A phenomenological study was not appropriate because I was not exploring the lived experiences of participants. Ethnographic researchers explore an entire culture of individuals to gain perspectives on their experiences (Eika, Dale, Espnes, & Hvalvik, 2015). An ethnography was not appropriate because I was not exploring the cultural aspects of IT organizations. Narrative inquiry researchers focus on the life events and stories of participants (Sahni & Sinha, 2016). A narrative inquiry was not suitable because I was not focusing on life events or participants' stories. Qualitative case study researchers conduct an in-depth

investigation of people, groups, or organizations to explore a phenomenon in a real-world setting (Yin, 2018). I selected a case study because I was conducting an in-depth investigation of a phenomenon in a real-world setting.

Research Question

RQ: What strategies do IT leaders use to improve employee engagement?

Interview Questions

1. How do you define employee engagement?
2. What strategies do you use to improve employee engagement?
3. What strategy did you find as most effective for improving employee engagement?
4. How do you measure the effectiveness of the strategies to improve employee engagement?
5. What were the key barriers to implementing strategies to improve employee engagement?
6. How did you overcome the key barriers you faced in implementing strategies to improve employee engagement?
7. What additional information would you like to share about strategies you use to improve employee engagement?

Conceptual Framework

Burns's (1978) transformational leadership theory was the conceptual framework for this study. Bass (1985) expanded Burns's original theory, adding that transformational leaders influence followers through trust, honesty, and loyalty. Leaders

and followers contribute to each other's advancement to higher levels through the following constructs: (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration (Burns, 1978). A leader can make a positive difference in a person's life (Bass, 1985). Kouzes and Posner (2002) linked worker motivation and satisfaction to employee engagement. Transformational leaders focus on understanding and supporting the needs of employees through engagement in mutually stimulating relationships (Denhardt & Campbell, 2006). Leaders who align their activities, behaviors, and leadership style with the constructs of the transformational leadership theory can improve employee morale (Burns, 1978). The transformational leadership theory served as an effective lens to explore strategies used to improve employee engagement.

Operational Definitions

Employee engagement: Employee engagement is the emotion, attitude, satisfaction, and overall view of employees in a work environment (Gupta, 2015).

Leadership: Leadership is behavior that influences others by inspiring, motivating, and energizing via the leader's vision for the benefit of the employees and organization (Nahavandi, 2009).

Leadership strategies: Leadership strategies are techniques or methods that influence the entire scope of activities of an organization to enhance organizational performance (Carter & Greer, 2013).

Transformational leadership: Leaders use transformational leadership when they apply their vision, personality, and behaviors to influence, inspire, and motivate followers

to perform at higher levels than previously considered possible (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are presumptions considered true but that are not verified by the researcher (Zlatanovic, 2016). Researchers must manage the risk associated with assumptions in a research study (McDonald, Oates, & Alevizou, 2016). In this multiple case study, I assumed that the participants responded honestly and openly when they provided explanations of the strategies used to improve employee engagement. The validity of the findings of this study depended on the credibility, confirmability, and accuracy of the data collected during interviews and reviewing documents of the companies. I received permission to review company policies and processes as related to strategies used to improve employee engagement. I assumed the documents were accurate, up-to-date, and complete.

Limitations

Svensson and Doumas (2013) noted that limitations are probable flaws that are not under the influence of the researcher. One limitation of the research was that the trustworthiness of the interview data collected remained dependent on the knowledge of the leaders in the three IT organizations. The sample population concentrated in Chicago, Illinois, was a limitation. Transferability of the findings by future researchers to other settings or cases was a limitation because of the limited scope of this study. The last limitation of the research was the reliance on the participants' honesty and the accuracy

of the supporting data on identifying leaders who successfully applied leadership strategies to improve employee engagement in the IT industry.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the boundaries or the scope of the research (Yin, 2018). Delimitations limit the scope, define the boundaries of the study, and are under the researcher's control (Yin, 2018). The geographic region of Chicago, Illinois, was a delimitation. The sample population of three leaders in the IT industry was a delimitation. The participant eligibility criterion of the leaders who successfully implemented leadership strategies to improve employee engagement in their organization was a delimitation. Another delimitation of the study was that the participants answered interview questions related to strategies leaders use to improve employee engagement in the IT industry; therefore, I did not report on any other issues that might affect leaders in the IT industry.

Significance of the Study

The significance of conducting a research study includes the potential value to business leaders as well as to society from the research study (Rasmussen, 2014). The potential value of this study included identifying effective strategies to improve employee engagement. That the contribution to improving business practices may result in social changes was among the possible benefits of this study.

Contribution to Business Practice

Business leaders potentially benefit from this study by gaining a better understanding of effective strategies to improve employee engagement. Leaders who

actively work to improve employee engagement outperform their competitors because of improved productivity (Garg, 2014). An increase in employee engagement increases organizational effectiveness and improves business performance (Leary et al., 2013). Business leaders who implement strategies to improve employee engagement might realize increased organizational effectiveness and improved financial performance (Leary et al., 2013).

Implications for Social Change

The implications for positive social change include the potential to improve employee engagement that may result in workers who are more resourceful, productive, and motivated in their personal lives. Engaged employees enjoy higher levels of job and personal satisfaction, experience less turnover and absenteeism, and lead lives that are more productive outside of the workplace than disengaged workers (Leary et al., 2013). Increased employee engagement might result in improved local economic stability, lower local unemployment rates, and increased community volunteerism. Community-based organizations may benefit because engaged employees tend to volunteer more time and resources for community service projects than disengaged employees (Krasnopolskaya et al., 2015).

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore leadership strategies to improve employee engagement in the IT industry to improve employee engagement. Baker (2016) posited that the literature review is a procedure researchers engage in to synthesize relevant literature from the existing body of knowledge. The

literature review of Burns (1978) and Bass (1985) were the focus of an exhaustive review related to the transformational leadership theory, which was the conceptual framework for this study. In this literature review, I focused on methods to improve employee engagement through leadership strategies, transformational leadership, and motivation.

Opening Narrative

In the literature review, I analyzed and synthesized studies related to leadership strategies, employee engagement, and applications of these studies for IT professionals. The goal of the literature review was to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of employee engagement, transformational leadership theory, and the IT industry.

I searched multiple online research databases, such as Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, Emerald Insight, ProQuest Central, Sage Journals, Google Scholar, and seminal scholarly books. I used multiple peer-reviewed journal articles and seminal books. I used keyword searches that included *employee engagement*, *disengagement*, *employee motivation*, *employee morale*, *leadership*, *transformational leadership*, and *transformational leadership theory*.

The sources used in this study were (a) 197 peer-viewed scholarly journals articles, (b) three dissertations, (c) 11 seminal books, and (d) one government source. Of the 212 sources used, 92.9% were peer-reviewed, and 191 sources had publication dates from 2014-2018, equating to 90% published within 5 years of my expected graduation date. Eighty-three references are unique to the literature review.

Transformational Leadership Theory

I chose the transformational leadership theory for the conceptual framework for my study. Transformational leaders influence and inspire their followers, which could lead to the development of strategies to improve employee engagement in the IT industry. Sarotar, Mulej, and Veingerl (2017) stated that transformational leadership has a positive impact on the well-being of employees and organizations across the globe.

Transformational leaders act as role models, creating a shared vision to inspire and empower their followers (Holten & Brenner, 2015). Transformational leaders create an atmosphere of commitment and motivation among their followers and influence, stimulate, and motivate their followers through a shared vision that appeals to their (Bonau, 2017). A positive relationship exists between transformational leadership style and employees' well-being (Sarotar et al., 2017). Transformational leaders exhibit behaviors that support and empower employees to increase levels of engagement. Bass (1985) expanded Burns's (1978) original theory, adding that transformational leaders influence followers through trust, honesty, and loyalty. A leader can make a positive difference in a person's life (Bass, 1985).

Bass (1985) postulated that transformational leadership influences followers through trust, honesty, and loyalty. In agreement with Bass, Burns (1978) found a transformational leadership style as the most effective in comparison to other leadership styles. In contrast to Bass and Burns, Penger and Cerne (2014) noted that authentic leaders can efficiently process information that could influence followers to adjust their

behaviors based on behaviors of the authentic leaders and that therefore authentic leadership is a better leadership style to improve employee engagement.

Transformational leaders lead through their ability to influence employees. Bass (1985) noted that followers seek leaders because of trust and honesty and the leader's ability to influence. Transformational leaders transform their followers through (a) increasing the awareness of task importance; (b) focusing the followers on the team and organizational goals, instead of their interests; and (c) activating the follower's higher-order of needs (Bass, 1985). Bass posited that transformational leaders are goal-oriented motivators who are helpful and passionate about leading. Bass developed a questionnaire to study skills and behaviors related to transformational leadership called the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Hamstra, Van Yperen, Wisse, & Sassenberg, 2014).

Transformational leadership is a process in which leaders and followers assist each other to advance to a higher level of morale and motivation (Burns, 1978). Burns (1978) noted that transformational leaders focus on motivation, values, and ethics. The transforming approach in leadership creates a significant change in the life of the employees and the organizations, and the transformation can change the perceptions, values, expectations, and aspirations of the employee (Burns, 1978). Choi, Goh, Adam, and Tan (2016), in agreement with Burns, found a significant relationship between transformational leadership and employee empowerment. Choi et al. found that leaders use transformational leadership characteristics to develop employees to achieve desired outcomes. Transformational leadership creates valuable and positive change in followers.

Bass (1985) supported the initial concepts of Burns (1978) transformational leadership style, and Burns believed that the leader can influence the follower's motivation and performance. Bass noted a leader is transformational by the leader's ability to influence followers, and the followers feel trust, loyalty, and respect for the leader because of the qualities of the transformational leader. Burns, in agreement with Bass, found that transformational leaders guide people to align with the organizational values and objectives. Malik, Javed, and Hassan (2017) found that a transformational leader is an example of the type of leader who can motivate employees by ensuring they have a clear vision of the organization's goals and the required skills to perform at higher levels. The transformational leader encourages followers to come up with new and unique ways to challenge the status quo and to alter the organization to ensure success.

Transformational leaders, as Bass (1985) noted, provide their followers with an inspiring mission and vision while transforming and motivating the followers through idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. Mokhber, Khairuzzaman, and Vakilbashi (2018), in agreement with Bass, found that a positive relationship exists between transformational leadership and organizational innovation, which could ensure the market success of the innovations. However, Mittal and Dhar (2015) found that while transformational leadership gained much attention from researchers, little research exists regarding the relationship between transformational leadership and employee creativity. The goal of Mittal and Dhar was to observe the positive effect of transformational leadership on employee creativity through creative self-efficacy in small and medium-sized IT organizations. Since 2005, work-related

outcomes for organizational productivity gained much attention because of the positive and negative consequences related to the outcomes (Mittal & Dhar, 2015). Leaders need to find new ways to motivate employees and develop their creative skills so they can deliver high quality and timely performance. Organizational leaders must build an environment that is innovative to attain a competitive advantage and continuous growth. Transformational leaders can share the vision of the organization, and they have the skills to motivate their employees to think in new and creative ways to solve business issues (Mittal & Dhar, 2015). Transformational leaders motivate their employees to deliver outcomes beyond expectations through developing employees' levels of beliefs and value systems.

Transformational leaders can transform the focus of their employees to focus on the collective vision of the organization and inspire them to think beyond their normal responsibilities to be innovative. Leaders can employ a transformational leadership style to assist with building a creative workplace by sharing a clear vision, encouraging employees, and promoting innovation and challenges for employees to meet and achieve (Mittal & Dhar, 2015). The transformational leader can stimulate the intellect, which can help motivate employees and promote the employee's creativity (Mittal & Dhar, 2015). However, Bass (1985) noted transformational leaders do more than motivate their followers. Mokhber et al. (2018), in agreement with Bass, found that transformational leaders help to grow their followers. Mittal and Dhar found that transformational leaders demonstrated a creative component. Mittal and Dhar, in agreement with Bass, noted that transformational leaders could develop employee creativity to do things in a better way,

and they can promote knowledge sharing with their employee to increase performance in the IT industry. Mittal and Dhar's findings indicated that a leader's ability to manage their employees could result in high levels of innovative self-efficacy, which positively affects employee creativity for the organization.

Leaders who have concerns for others and have ethical and moral values can create and communicate a vision to influence their followers through their value system. Hunt (2017) noted that ethical, transformational, and authentic leaders support the moral and ethical foundations in organizations. Leaders who demonstrate positive moral behaviors that focus on relationships with the follower, the development of the follower, and the concern for the follower practice effective leadership. Atwijuka and Caldwell (2017), in agreement with Hunt, found that leaders who have insights into building relationships and earning followers' commitment create organizations that perform efficiently and effectively and compete against their competitors successfully. Copeland (2016) found that organizations must have leaders who are ethical, authentic, and transformational because such leaders are more effective in achieving organizational outcomes. Copeland noted that business leaders experienced some failures in the United States, and as a result, researchers believed the need existed for a renewed focus on restoring hope, confidence, and integrity to leaders. Leadership effectiveness needs to expand beyond charismatic and include characteristics of authenticity and ethics in leaders who would look out for the best interest of others, the organization, and society as a whole (Copeland, 2016). Leaders who are authentic and ethical are effective in leading their employees and the organization.

Copeland (2016) posited that organizations in the United States should strengthen their criteria for leadership. Hunt (2017) found that ethical, authentic, and transformational leaders are central to effective leadership. For leaders to be effective and achieve positive long-term organizational outcomes, leaders must possess genuine authentic and ethical leadership qualities (Copeland, 2016). A leader who is values-based is more effective in achieving positive outcomes than a leader who does not exhibit values. Copeland (2016) noted a transformational leader influences their employee's behavior; however, for a leader to be genuinely transformational, the leader must have characteristics that are moral, ethical, and authentic. Atwijuka and Caldwell (2017), in agreement with Copeland, found that effective leaders understand the employees seek meaning, purpose, and fulfillment in their work.

Leaders, as related to ethical, authentic, and transformational leadership, create an environment in which the organizational stakeholders can evaluate the effectiveness of the leader's outcomes. Copeland (2016) noted that authentic leaders could improve deficiencies in leaders because they have a deep sense of purpose, possess ethical values, remain disciplined, understand their purpose, and know how to establish a connectedness with those with whom they interact. Ethical leadership is important to counteract the lack of a moral compass in decision making by leaders. Ethical leaders demonstrate a genuine concern for people, and they will make an ethical decision and be accountable in adhering to ethical principles (Copeland, 2016). Transformational leaders focus on motivating their followers to accomplish their goals. Transformational leaders encourage

their followers to look beyond their self-interest and focus on the best interests of the organization.

A leader who is authentic and ethical possess the ability to create positive outcomes. Copeland (2016) noted that a requirement of effective leadership is the leader must be authentic and demonstrate good ethical behaviors to achieve positive organizational outcomes. Copeland posited that leaders who are ethical, authentic, and transformational are more effective than leaders who do not possess these skills. Gatling, Kang, and Kim (2016), in agreement with Copeland, found that authentic leadership cultivates self-awareness and is critical to organizational outcomes such as employee engagement and empowerment, job satisfaction, and quality job performance. Transformational and authentic leadership are both linked to strong virtues and morals, which can have a positive impact on engaging employees.

Transformational leadership is a style that leaders use to enhance and motivate the performance of followers, which can positively benefit organizational goals. Effelsberg, Solga, and Gurt (2014) noted that leaders use transformational leadership theory to inspire employees to change their views, expectations, and motivations to achieve shared goals. Aryee, Walumbwa, Zhou, and Hartnell (2012) noted that transformational theory has four guiding principles, which are (a) idealized inspiration, (b) stimulating motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individual thoughtfulness.

Transformational leaders create a vision and develop strategies others are willing to follow. Okcu (2014), in concert with Bass (1985), believed transformational leaders express leadership strategies through four constructs. Marques (2015) noted that

authentic leaders use these same constructs as transformational leaders to engage their followers. Leaders and followers contribute to each other's advancement to higher levels through the following constructs: (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration (Burns, 1978). Idealized influence refers to the ability of the leader to provide a clear vision and earn the respect of the followers. Louw, Muriithi, and Radloff (2017) defined idealized influence as the leader's ability to have a vision and mission for the organization and behavior that can generate purposeful performance by the followers. Salas-Vallina and Fernandez (2017) noted that inspirational motivation exists when a leader can predict the future, develop an achievable plan, create high-performance levels, and possess the conviction to achieve the action while motivating followers. Yaslioglu and Erden (2018) posited that leaders use intellectual stimulation to gain followers' trust through a specific course of action that generates inspiration. When the leaders intellectually stimulate followers, followers are encouraged to speak up, find solutions, and try new ways (Yaslioglu & Erden, 2018). Individualized consideration occurs when leaders promote the individual development of their followers while personalizing the development in their interactions with their employees to build relationships while having open communication with the employees.

Leadership is important to any organization because strong leadership results in organizational success in the industry. Effective leaders motivate employees to achieve organizational goals. Leavy (2016) noted effective leadership is about new directions for leadership thinking and practice as it relates to the character, identity, and values of the leader, and not just the competence of the leader. Marques (2015) demonstrated the

challenges in leadership performance and the potential of the leadership style in the ever-changing shifts in a performance environment. Marques posited that many circumstances could drive the need for change, and a leader must have the ability to make adjustments given the demands of a global market. Rodriguez and Rodriguez (2015) commented on leaders who face specific situations as they relate to the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world. In the changing global market, a new generation is changing the way relationships are formed, the way individuals work, and how knowledge transfers.

Marques, in agreement with Rodriguez and Rodriguez, noted that transformational leaders possess important skills, and style leaders will need to improve performance while engaging employees of different generations in a changing global market that is volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. There are different leader styles beyond transformational leadership that can also affect change in employee engagement and performance.

Complementary and Alternative Theories

Complementary and alternative theories I considered are authentic leadership theory, personal engagement theory, and disengagement theory. Authentic leadership theorists emphasize building the leader's legitimacy through honest relationships with followers by valuing the follower's input (Braun & Peus, 2016). The authentic leader can efficiently process information about themselves and adjust their behavior and personal identities to meet the demands of others (Penger & Cerne, 2014). An authentic leader could develop leadership strategies to improve employee engagement. Kahn (1990) posited researchers and business leaders use personal engagement and disengagement

theory to measure the levels of employee engagement and disengagement displayed through commitment. In diverse working conditions, individuals may choose to become cognitively, mentally, emotionally, physically engaged, or disengaged from job roles and organizational tasks in diverse working conditions (Kahn, 1990). Engagement and disengagement are measurable concepts for leaders to develop strategies to improve employee engagement (Kahn, 1990). Authentic leaders build trust through authenticity to generate engaged employees.

Authentic leadership theory. Authentic leaders create legitimacy with their followers through open, honest, ethical, and positive communications (Scheepers & Elstob, 2016). Authentic leadership is about leaders owning personal experiences while being true to self (Scheepers & Elstob, 2016). Scheepers and Elstob (2016) noted that authentic leadership has a deep sense of self-awareness about the leader's values and beliefs related to issues regarding how the leader makes decisions. Lin, Huang, Chen, and Huang (2017) noted two types of transformational leaders exist: authentic and pseudo-transformational leaders. Authentic transformational leaders operate ethically and morally in their words and actions to motivate their employees (Lin et al., 2017). Pseudo-transformational leaders focus on their self-interest and status within the organization, and they have exploit behaviors to influence their employee's loyalty and dependence on them and doing whatever is necessary to motivate their employees (Lin et al., 2017). The challenge for organizations is the authentic and pseudotransformational leaders have similar behaviors. Leaders within organizations will have to find methods to evaluate

their supervisors and look for behaviors that violate moral and ethical behaviors, used for their self-interest to manipulate their employees.

Authentic leadership is the leader being true to self. Marques (2015) noted that an authentic leader uses these behaviors: (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration. The behaviors listed allow authentic leaders to build a relationship of trust with their followers. Authentic leaders remain true to their purpose and their decision as they lead to motivate, build team support, and empower their followers to lead with higher moral standards and integrity (Marques, 2015). Transformational leaders also establish a strong relationship with their followers. Marques posited that a transformational leader uses strategies and techniques to elevate the performance of their followers to change their values, so the followers align to follow the leader's vision. Transformational leaders use the same behaviors and constructs as authentic leadership to inspire their followers. Gyanchandani (2017), in concert with Marques, found that leaders influence the values and actions of the employees to improve performance outcomes and organizational goals. Conversely, Bui, Zeng, and Higgs (2017) found that a leader's behaviors and style could affect the behaviors of their followers, and transformational leader's ability to inspire and empower can be a strong motivation to improve employee engagement. Transformational leadership allows leaders to enable employees towards success in improving performance, success in navigating organization change, and for creating a vision to implement change with followers on behalf of the organization.

Personal engagement and disengagement theory. In a work environment, employees will personally engage and express themselves and will disengage if they feel the need to protect their personal selves. Ford, Myrden, and Jones (2015) noted that individuals in any given situation would be engaged in their work actively and fully performing their role at work is the nature of personal engagement and disengagement theory. Ford et al. stated that disengaged employees lack energy or thought and are not actively engaged and fully participating in their role at work. Ford et al. noted the three predictors of disengagement at work are meaningfulness, safety, and availability. Meaningfulness relates to the employee's sense of return on investment. Safety is a feeling experienced by the employee in respect to being true to oneself without fear of negative consequences work (Ford et al., 2015). Availability relates to the employee's physical, emotional, and mental resources for investing themselves in their job performances work (Ford et al., 2015). Offord, Gill, and Kendal (2016) in agreement with Ford et al., found that engagement within an organization is when employees give of their personal selves, and disengaged individuals do not give of themselves. Conversely, Kahn (1990) found that an engaged individual plays a role at work where they may have boundaries between their work role and the individual's role within the organization. Personal engagement and disengagement theory, if not managed by leadership, can have a negative impact if individual employees do not have a connection or commitment to the organization.

Employee Engagement

An engaged employee is absorbed and enthusiastic about the work and the organization. Caniels, Semeijn, and Renders (2018) noted that employee engagement is essential to achieving organizational goals, and leaders must develop strategies to engage their employees. Bakker and Albrecht (2018) found that employee engagement is a predictor of how employees and organizations will perform, and leadership is essential to employee engagement. Conversely, Mahajan and Sharma (2015) found that employee engagement is a connection between an employee and the leadership within the organization, which has a direct and indirect influence on the employee's behaviors and work performance. Employee engagement is important for IT leaders because of the impact on performance and increased profitability (Albdour & Altarawneh, 2014).

Engaged employees bring all aspects of themselves to their work role and performance. Kahn (1990) defined employee engagement as when individuals employ and express themselves cognitively, physically, or personally when performing a job role. Kahn initially named the term as personal engagement. Kahn viewed moments of engagement (or disengagement) in some instances as the employee's responses to their work environments and individual variables of the employees (Huertas-Valdivia, Llorens-Montes, & Ruiz-Moreno, 2018). Some scholars recognized employee engagement as an interchangeable term with personal engagement, role engagement, work engagement, and job engagement (Carasco-Saul, Kim, & Kim, 2014).

Leadership and leadership style is essential for engaging employees. Cheema, Akram, and Javed (2015) stated there is an impact on employee engagement and

leadership style on employee satisfaction. Cheema et al. noted that hard-working, engaged employees could attract other engaged, intelligent, and skilled employees to the organization. Leadership plays a vital role in how the employee responds within the work environment, and leadership has a key role to play to create a work environment that inspires employee engagement and commitment to improve performance and stay competitive in an ever-changing global environment (Cheema et al., 2015).

Engaged employees have higher employee productivity and performance. Stoyanova and Iliev (2017) stated that employee engagement could positively affect an organization performance and the design research to identify ways to engage employees. Stoyanova and Iliev posited that leaders must develop and retain the best employees, and in time, they could become leaders of the organization. The key to improving and increasing employee engagement is an engaged and successful leader. Adarsh and Kumar (2017) stated that employee engagement has a positive relationship with the organization's financial performance. Employees who feel empowered in their work environment could feel more engaged and willing to work towards achieving the organizational goals, which could increase performance and profitability. Some of the methods mentioned to empower employees are ongoing training, better pay, and making the employees feel secure within their job and the organization. Cheema et al. (2015) noted that leadership is critical to engaging employees. Stoyanova and Iliev, in concert with Cheema et al., found that leadership is essential to creating an environment of engaged employees, so organizations can achieve their organizational goals and increase performance. Conversely, Adarsh and Kumar found that engaged employees to achieve

organizational goals; however, they have a specific focus related to improved financial performance.

Some engaged employees are creative, satisfied, innovative, productive, and profitable. Radda et al. (2015) stated that engaged employees could offer positive benefits related to strong solutions and outcomes. Engaged employees increase customer loyalty, profitability, and productivity (Radda et al., 2015). Engaged employees provide a competitive advantage within an organization because of their commitment to the organization. Al Mehrzi and Singh (2016) noted leaders could enhance employee performance and increased job satisfaction to achieve organizational goals. Al Mehrzi and Singh noted a linkage between the leader, the team, perceived organizational support, and organizational culture as related to the creation of an engaged organization. Iqbal, Shabbir, Zameer, Ahmed, and Ahmad (2017), in agreement with Al Mehrzi and Sing, found employee engagement could improve employee performance for sustainable growth within the organization in a competitive work environment.

Employees are more engaged in their job, and the organization when they are satisfied, and organizations benefit through increased productivity, increased profits, and a competitive advantage. Al Mehrzi and Singh (2016) noted that leaders in organizations who focus on the culture, leadership, perceived organizational support, and teamwork, all could contribute to an atmosphere of engaged employees. Iqbal et al. (2017), in agreement with Al Mehrzi and Singh, found that there are additional benefits to an organization related to the improved performance by engaged employees. Leadership within the organization could demonstrate sustainable growth and a competitive work

environment with engaged employees. Individuals are more engaged in their job and the organization when they experience jobs satisfaction the organization will realize additional benefits such as increased productivity, increased profits, and a competitive advantage.

Leaders could develop strategic plans to enhance the experience of workers professional growth while increasing their motivation and performance. Mehta et al. (2016) commented on the strategies used by various global organizational leaders to engage their employees to maintain a competitive advantage through employee empowerment, commitment, and growth. Jena, Pradhan, and Panigrahy (2018), in agreement with Mehta et al., found that engaged employees through their work demonstrate their trust and commitment to the organization. Transformational leaders articulate an engaging vision for their employees, which assist the employees in realizing their personal needs and organizational goals. Conversely, Jha and Kumar (2016) found that employee engagement is a bilateral communication process between the organizational leader and the employee. The organizations must have a strategy to improve employee engagement to improve performance and gain a competitive advantage. Mehta et al. expanded the research related to benefits such as gaining a competitive advantage through employee engagement, empowerment, and commitment to the organization. Jena et al. noted that transformational leadership creates a vision that is engaging to assist employees in realizing their own work needs while achieving organizational goals. Jena et al. noted that the engaged employee's level of trust and commitment to the organization improves along with their work performance. Jha and

Kumar concentrated on employee engagement and two-way communication between the employee and the organization, along with benefits of increased productivity and performance by engaged employees. Employee engagement is critical to business performance, and engaged employees allow organizations to be competitive (Jha & Kumar, 2016). Stoyanova and Iliev (2017) defined employee engagement as a relationship between the organization, management, and the employee. Engaged employees who have opportunities to improve possess some or all of the following attributes.

An engaged employee has a positive outlook on their job and the organization. An engaged employee believes in the organization. An engaged employee works to make the organization better. Engaged employees identified with the organization and engaged employees go beyond the requirements of the job. Stoyanova and Iliev (2017) indicated that employees who are highly satisfied with their jobs and the organization usually demonstrate high levels of engagement. Leaders noted that individuals who are highly dissatisfied are also highly disengaged. Engaged employees are willing to work towards the success of the organization through positive interactions with others to achieve organizational success.

Effective leadership motivates employees to achieve organizational goals. Bandura and Lyons (2017) noted that engaged employees desire to transform their work into job and organizational accomplishments. However, Bandura and Lyons (2017) found that engagement might appear temporary because even the best employees may experience occasional disengagement. Lardner (2015) identified rewards and benefits

strategies needed to retain key staff, attract, and engage employees. A competitive marketplace is essential for organizations to have a better understanding of the needs of employees to improve employee engagement. Lardner found that rewards and benefits strategies offer leadership options to encourage and reward performance and career growth opportunities. Bandura and Lyons posited that organizations must be successful within their organization to succeed in the marketplace, and employee engagement is critical to organizations internal and external success. Lardner postulated on employee engagement, noting different aspects of employee engagement. Bandura and Lyons, in agreement with Lardner, noted that leaders need skill-building tools to enhance and motivate employees to increase employee agreement to retain key staff, attract, and engage employees. Leaders must not focus on just improving employee engagement, but also developing strategies to keep engaged staff and to attract engaged employees (Lardner, 2015).

Transformational leaders have moral values and high ethics while creating a vision that employees are willing to follow. Gyanchandani (2017) stated leaders influence the values, culture, and actions of individuals within an organization. Leaders can positively impact the performance and outcomes within the organization. The focus of Gyanchandani research is on transformational leadership within the IT industry and their effect on team performance. Bui et al. (2017) stated there is a healthy relationship between transformational leadership and employees work engagement. Bui et al. noted a leader's behaviors and style could affect the behaviors of their followers, and transformational leader's ability to inspire and empower can be a strong motivation to

improved employee engagement. Ng (2017) affirmed transformational leaders affect employee's job performance, and transformational leadership could increase organizational productivity. Gyanchandani, in accord with Ng, noted that there is research that supports the positive impacts on employees by transformational leaders and the following four mechanisms (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration. Ng, in agreement with Gyanchandani, noted that there is a relationship between transformational leadership and increased job performance. Conversely, Bui et al. found there is a positive relationship between transformational leadership and improving employee engagement. Bui et al. all noted that transformational leadership has a positive impact on the employees and the organization.

Disengaged Employees

Disengaged employees tend to reduce organizational outcomes; therefore, leaders should recognize the negative effects of disengaged workers on the organization. Employee disengagement can negatively affect organizational outcomes (Purcell, 2014). Cheema et al. (2015) stated that disengaged employees could cost more to the organization through lost productivity and profits. Disengaged employees go to work to perform their jobs without any passion or energy. Popli and Rizvi (2015) noted that disengaged employees require leaders to instruct them on the tasks they need to perform, and the disengaged employees will perform the function of work, which can affect productivity. Swartout, Boykin, Dixon, and Ivanov (2015), in agreement with Cheema et

al., noted that disengaged employees lack motivation and are less likely to show any energy or effort to accomplish their job and meet organizational goals.

Disengaged employees can negatively affect the organizations through low productivity, performance, and profitability. Helbling (2018) noted that 70% of employees become disengaged each day, and this can affect an organization's productivity because of poor job performance related to disengagement. A leader must focus on hiring the best employee who fit into a specific role within the organization. Helbling posited that disengaged employees who are not productive are ineffective and cause lost productivity, and disengaged employees could also negatively affect team performance and productivity within the department and organization. Auh, Menguc, Spyropoulou, and Wang (2015), in treaty with Helbling, found disengaged employees could be detrimental to an organization because of performance problems. Equally, Abdallah (2016) postulated that poor performance with disengaged employees affects the individual, team, and organization. Disengaged employees are discontent and negative and produce lower productivity and lower job performance.

Employee personal issues often have a way of leaking into your employees' work lives, which can affect productivity and performance. Abdallah (2016) noted personal issues might affect job performance within organizations, which can affect performance and as a result affect profitability within the organization. Abdallah posited poor performance could show in the following areas, such as employee availability, employee productivity, and employee conduct. Linski (2014) noted that transitioning to participative management within the organization would improve the leader's ability to

implement organizational change successfully. Linski posited that participative management is a style that ensures employees at every level are encouraged to contribute their ideas toward identifying and setting organizational goals and other decisions, which may directly affect them. McManus and Mosca (2015) posited the importance of improving employee morale while listing actions organizations could take to enhance employee engagement during times of organizational change. McManus and Mosca noted the key drivers in managing organizational change to improve job performance and employee morale by using strategies and leadership styles, which will work best for their particular organization and study.

Poor leadership practices contribute to employee disengagement and dissatisfaction. Ye and King (2016) employees who do not trust in management experience disengagement with their work and the organization. Disengaged employees pre-existing trust in management can have perpetual effects on engagement related to management and organizational change. If employees experience negative effects, designed to improve engagement and increase productivity, there can be an adverse impact, which causes disengagement and decreased productivity when employees do not trust management decisions, which affect the organization. Gatling et al. (2016) found that trust could mediate the relationship between leadership, employee engagement, and employee performance.

Leaders must have the skills to develop strategies to benefit the organization and resolve issues, which may arise. Allen, Carpenter, Dydak, and Harkins (2016) posited organizations need leaders who can effectively manage complex business needs. Leaders

who manage these projects should have personal, interpersonal, and group skills to inspire others to achieve the goals and objectives of the project for the organization (Allen et al., 2016). Strong evidence found by Chalker and Loosemore (2016) indicated that high levels of trust influences productivity and high levels of trust influences high morale (Chalker & Loosemore, 2016). Trust involves good communication, transparency, empowerment of employees, high morale, and high productivity. Kocakulah et al. (2016) suggested that employee absences are both disruptive and costly for an organization. Kocakulah et al. commented that employee absences could have a negative impact on employee morale and productivity. The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated that almost 2.8 million workdays are lost each year because of employee absences, which affects the organization's profit and loss statement (Kocakulah et al., 2016). Leaders must possess personal, interpersonal, and group skills to inspire and achieve organizational goals (Allen et al., 2016). Chalker and Loosemore concentrated on the importance of trust between employees and leaders to ensure employees feel empowered, have high morale, and ultimately high productivity. Lastly, Kocakulah et al. posited high employee absences, noting the real effect on productivity and loss revenue. Kocakulah et al. noted that leadership drives positive change to ensure employee morale and productivity are high within the organization. Allen et al., in agreement with Kocakulah et al., found that leaders must be able skills to manage complex business needs and issues. Conversely, Chalker and Loosemore found that high levels of trust affect morale and productivity.

Metrics are a way for leaders to gauge employee engagement and performance.

Groen, Wouters, and Wilderom (2016) postulated that performance metrics are beneficial

and linked to greater employee job performance from higher quality employees. Ünal and Turgut (2015) stated that the relationship between person-organization value fit and employee engagement and developing a scale to measure organizational engagement. Personal-organization fit refers to personal value and organizational values, and these values measured by the organizational culture profile (Ünal & Turgut, 2015). Ünal and Turgut concentrated on employee engagement in two terms, which are work engagement and organizational engagement. Ünal and Turgut found person-organization positively contributed to both work engagement and organizational engagement.

Consiglio, Borgogni, Di Tecco, and Schaufeli (2016) stated that employee well-being and performance predict work engagement directly and indirectly through positive changes in employee's perceptions in a social setting. Consiglio et al., in concert with Ünal and Turgut, found that employee well-being, self-efficacy, and performance could predict work engagement directly and indirectly. Groen et al. (2016) posited a performance metric to gauge higher quality employees and their engagement and performance. Groen et al. found that when an employee participates in performance metrics, managers discovered that performance was higher. Groen et al. found that managers who want to ensure that the effect on employee job performance is positive should include employees in the development of operational performance metrics. Ünal and Turgut found that individuals who experience organizational engagement have an attachment to the organization and are more productive. Ünal and Turgut concentrated on the relationship between person-organization value fit and employee engagement, which is not the same as Groen et al. Ünal and Turgut also created their metric to gauge work

engagement and organizational engagement to improve engagement within the organization. Consiglio et al. noted that there is no particular metric to measure work engagement. Ünal and Turgut developed their metric to gauge engagement. Consiglio et al. posited on the well-being and performance to predict work engagement directly and indirectly through employee's perceptions.

Leaders must find approaches to guide employees in ways that may create a positive work environment that engages all stakeholders. Ramlall, Al-Kahtani, and Damanhour (2014) discovered practices which can create benefits for all stakeholders through creating an environment of positive organizational behavior and identifying gaps in current organizational practices to build stronger, confident, and sustainable organizations. Stewart-Banks, Kuofie, Hakim, and Branch (2015) stated that leadership styles could have an impact on performance and employee morale. Stewart-Banks et al. commented on the characteristics of leaders and motivational factors utilized to improve job performance and morale. Zondi and Mutambara (2016) postulated how organizational change strategies had affected employee morale and job performance. Ramlall et al., in agreement with Stewart-Banks et al., noted that the work environment could have both a positive or negative impact on employees and the organization. Zondi and Mutambara indicated that leadership's role and decisions are important and these decisions have a direct impact on the employees and organizations.

Employee Engagement in the Information Technology Industry

Transformational leaders create valuable and positive change in followers, potentially resulting in employee engagement within the IT industry. Ghasabeh, Soosay,

and Reaiche (2015) commented on the emergence of transformational leadership. Ghasabeh et al. noted that transformational leadership is a strong style in the face of global market affecting goods, services, values, and technologies. Soane, Butler, and Stanton (2015) noted that effective leadership and performance are important in organizations and other areas. Ghasabeh et al. stated that followers' personalities could influence the perceptions of leadership and perceived effective leadership has an association with performance. Sarotar et al. (2017) commented that transformational leadership is important to the positive impact on the well-being of employees and humankind's survival in our current global world. The well-being of employees can reduce many societal troubles and related costs resulting from the narrow-minded behavior of managers and employees, which can affect society as a whole. Ghasabeh et al. noted transformational leadership is an effective style. Soane et al., in agreement with Ghasabeh et al., found effective leadership could improve performance. Conversely, Sarotar et al. found leadership and transformational leadership are effective in inspiring and motivating employees to products, services, and the human condition within the organization.

Engaged workers have positive benefits such as increased profitability, higher productivity, customer satisfaction, and reduced turnover. An engaged employee is fully committed to and excited about their job, and they take positive actions to achieve organizational goals and interests (Ford et al., 2015). McManus and Mosca (2015) noted there are strategies organizations can take to rebuild employee morale and engagement to create a more productive workplace. McManus and Mosca noted work engagement could

assist in rebuilding morale as work engagement is a positive, fulfilling, and effective motivational strategy to address low morale. Bhalla (2016) posited that employee productivity and performance could have a direct or indirect impact the improvement of the individual, the organization, and society's well-being when organization introduces incentives such as flexible work arrangements. Lasrado, Arif, Rizvi, and Urdzik (2016) postulated leaders who create employee suggestion scheme's allow for more employee involvement which can be used within an organization and create new ideas and innovations to improve work processes, engage and empower employees. Employee suggestion schemes encourage the employee to come up with creative ideas to improve the work environment. McManus and Mosca stated strategies leaders could you can have a positive impact on job satisfaction, productivity, and morale. Bhalla commented that productivity and performance when organizations develop strategies that can have an impact on productivity and morale.

Leaders and engaged followers have a good relationship using transformational leadership. Mozammel and Haan (2016) found that there is a relationship between transformation leadership and employee engagement. Mozammel and Haan posited that there is a correlation between effective leadership and high employee engagement. Stoyanova and Iliev (2017) identified ways to increase employee engagement within the organization to improve performance. Management is a critical factor in grooming leaders who can engage employees by providing opportunities for career development and employee recognition within the organization. Singh, Singh, and Beatty (2016) postulated that technology leaders engage their employees with technology to create a

high-performance work environment. Singh et al. noted that job involvement, work involvement, altruism, and employee attitudes related to job satisfaction, and the employee level of morale and optimism. Stoyanova and Ilieva, in agreement with Singh et al., found significant characteristics of engaged employees. Conversely, Mozammel and Haan found that transformational leadership style and the correlation to engaged employees; although the results did not indicate a positive impact on transformational leadership and engaged employees.

Leaders must find ways to improve employee morale to ensure a competitive edge, sustainability, and success within the organization. Slack, Corlett, and Morris (2014) noted that corporate social responsibility affects employee morale and engagement. Vembu and Suvitha (2016), in agreement with Slack et al., found that employee morale is crucial to the importance of employee morale and the organization's success. Vembu and Suvitha stated that high morale leads to success, and low morale brings defeat to an organization and that the success or failure of the industry depended on the morale the employees have towards the organization. Singh et al. (2016) commented on high-performance work environments can improve engagement and behaviors with technology within the organization.

Leaders recognize that engaged employees can increase profitability and performance. Antony (2018) postulated that employee engagement has a direct impact on performance. Engaged employees tend to perform better and enhance productivity. As management implemented changes, there is a direct impact on employee morale and job performance, which positively affected customers. Antony noted the existence of a direct

link with organizational policies and strategic plans, which add value within the organization, and employee friendly policies can have a positive impact on employment. Soundarapandiyan and Ganesh (2015) stated that voluntary employee turnover has a negative impact on the organization, and leaders must find a way to reduce or eliminate the turnover. Soundarapandiyan and Ganesh noted leaders must reduce employee turnover by developing strategies to retain employees, improve employee morale, and reduce turnover costs to the organization. Conversely, Martin and Omrani (2015) found that leader's innovative work practices could have a positive link with improving employee turnover, organizational performance, employee's task involvement, organizational commitment, and citizenship behaviors. Leaders within the organization are the drivers of change, and the leaders must focus on ways to reduce or eliminate volunteer employee turnover by innovative ways to ensure employees experience job satisfaction, increased productivity, and improved performance by improving employee morale.

Low employee morale remains a challenge for IT leaders. Swartout et al. (2015) noted that many organizational leaders struggle with low employee morale. Swartout et al. postulated that low morale is a symptom of larger issues within an organization, and their focus related to these more significant issues. Ho-Jin and June-Suh (2016) postulated techno-stress impacts employee job satisfaction. Ho-Jin and June-Suh noted technostress results when employees might not have the skills to perform the tasks and individuals might have more concerns over job security. Yi-Feng (2016) noted that leadership is important and that trust and commitment are key to employee job

satisfaction. Yi-Feng pointed out that transformational leadership has a positive impact on job satisfaction as it relates to leadership trust and change commitment is central to the study of organizational behavior, and that transformation leadership can influence job satisfaction when the leader has a vision that is supported by the employees. Swartout et al. noted that leaders struggle with low employee morale. Ho-Jin and June-Suh, in agreement with Swartout, found that techno-stress can impact job satisfaction. Conversely, Yi-Feng found that leaders are the drivers of change and can improve low employee morale and job satisfaction. Leaders who build a work environment based on trust, commitment, and relationship building with employees can improve low morale and create a climate where employees experience job satisfaction.

Transformational leaders can have a positive impact on employee morale and job satisfaction. Malik et al. (2017) noted the importance of the influence of transformational leadership on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and trust within the organization to ensure success. Malik et al. postulated that employee's mood and their level of job satisfaction could affect performance, and that skill alone is not the only determinant of performance. Employee job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational trust affect job performance, and transformational leaders could work to engage employees successfully (Malik et al., 2017). Conversely, Choi et al. (2016) found a significant relationship between transformational leadership, job satisfaction, and employee empowerment. Transformational leaders ability to mediate the relationship between job satisfaction and employee empowerment to achieve organization goals. The

role of transformational leadership is to enhance their employee's organizational commitment, which can ensure job satisfaction (Choi et al., 2016).

Transformational leaders have an opportunity to develop a creative approach to attain and sustain a creative work environment while the organization can realize benefits such as a competitive advantage. Mittal and Dhar (2015) noted the importance of transformational leadership on employee creativity within small and medium-sized IT organizations. Within the IT industry, employees are critical to the growth and success of the organization and building a creative environment is key to creativity and high-quality performance. Malik et al. (2017), in agreement with Mittal and Dhar, found that transformational leadership is beneficial to improving job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and trust. Conversely, Choi et al. (2016) found that there is a direct relationship between transformational leadership, job satisfaction, and employee empowerment.

Leaders recognized volunteering has a social impact on the individual and the organization. Krasnopolskaya et al. (2015) noted that volunteering could affect socializing through corporate volunteering activities, and this could make employees more likely to volunteer within the organization. Krasnopolskaya et al. posited that there is a positive relationship between corporate volunteering and engagement and volunteering and engagement beyond the work environment, which can benefit local communities. Kerns (2014) noted the importance of managerial accountability to improve employee engagement through volunteering to reduce the costs organizations pay with disengaged employees. Kerns noted that organizational leaders must develop strategies to

improve the work environment through engagement and to enhance employee well-being and job performance. Gupta (2015), in concert with Kerns, found that different employee engagement tools and strategies to determine ways to could improve employee engagement and to understand the employee's thoughts regarding engagement.

Stoyanova and Iliev (2017) found a way to increase employee engagement within the organization to improve performance. Stoyanova and Iliev found that leaders are critical to engaged employees, and that employee engagement is a relationship between the organization, management, and the employee. Krasnopolskaya et al. (2015) noted that employee engagement could have an impact on the local community and society. When employees are engaged in work-related volunteering, it can have an impact on their willingness to volunteer beyond the work environment. Conversely, Kerns (2014) and Gupta (2015) do not focus on employee engagement regarding organizational volunteering and volunteering within the community. Kerns noted the importance of increasing managerial accountability and strategies leaders could use to improve employee engagement, as there is an organizational cost with disengaged employees. Gupta posited on strategies to improve employee engagement but confirmed the strategies (tools) leaders could use to improve employee engagement.

Leaders recognize many factors within a work environment can improve employee morale and engagement. Sania, Kalpina, and Javed (2015) noted managing diversity within an organization could enhance employee morale in the workforce. Organizations that have diverse employees can better compete in the global market. Senthilnathan and Rukshani (2015) posited employee morale is a significant factor in

determining organizational health and organizational performance. Senthilnathan and Rukshani noted organizational trust within an employee might create employee morale within the organization. Kamal and Kamal (2014) commented that leaders who were not willing to take responsibility for their action and delayed decision-making created an environment where employee morale had diminished. Sania et al. postulated on the importance of diversity to enhance productivity and compete in a global market. Senthilnathan and Rukshani commented on employee morale being a significant factor in organizational well-being. Senthilnathan and Rukshani research identified how organization trust could create an environment where employee morale is high within the organization.

Technology is affecting society and leaders must consider all information to ensure a positive impact on the organization. Gerth and Peppard (2014) noted that the chief information officer (CIO) had become an executive position with the goal of transforming and innovating within IT departments and organizations. Information Technology affects every area of an organization and has a positive effect on the development of relationships within the organization. Davenport (2014) found that information is changing rapidly, and there are positive and negative examples of information and the impact on leadership. Davenport posited that leaders should be aware of how technology changes in day-to-day activities, and the impact and consequences of the activities. In our ever-changing global world leaders have to stay current in their skills, and understand how technology affects their interactions with their staff, and how technology affects a changing global world.

Organizational commitment and job satisfaction are critical to improving job performance and increased levels of job involvement. Mete, Sokmen, and Biyik (2016) noted the importance of organizational commitment and job satisfaction of IT professionals. For an organization to create a competitive advantage, they must have highly competent employees who are committed to the long-term success of the organization. Information technology professionals have organization-specific knowledge and experience, which contribute to growth and competitiveness, that is important beyond business operations. If IT professionals are not satisfied with their job, dissatisfaction can lead to low motivation, low morale, and low job performance. Antony (2018) noted employee engagement occurs at a personal level within organizations. Asli, Gilaninia, and Homayounfar (2016) noted employees are the most important stakeholder in an organization, and understanding organizational behavior is critical to organizational success within the IT industry. Asli et al. commented on the impact within IT on job behavior. For organizations to be successful, they must have a good strategy to ensure value to the organization. Asli et al. noted IT used as a tool could help employees raise their performance to ensure more efficiency with technology, which is always changing.

Mete et al. (2016) noted that IT organization and professionals must take steps to improve to improve job satisfaction and well-being. Mete et al. noted that job satisfaction and organizational commitment could improve performance. Jesuthasan (2017), in concert with Mete et al., found that technology could improve employee engagement by enabling employees through an energized and productive work environment with leadership support. Conversely, Asli et al. (2016) found that organizational behavior has

an impact on the organization and that leaders must create an environment that concentrates on job behaviors and attitudes to improve performance and job satisfaction within the IT department.

Transition

Section 1 contained an explanation of the problem of the study, the purpose of the research study, the method and design, and the conceptual framework. I discussed the potential significance and value of the study to business leaders as well as how the findings might lead to positive social change. Section 1 included an overview of employee engagement, leadership styles and strategies, and the nature of the study.

Section 2 contained a description of my role in the research, the eligibility criteria for the participants, the sample method, and the data collection procedures. I discussed maintaining ethical standards, the data analysis procedures, ensuring dependability, credibility, and confirmability as well as attaining data saturation. Section 2 contained a detailed explanation of the plans to conduct the study on the research topic of employee engagement in the IT industry in Chicago, Illinois.

In Section 3, I discussed the findings and results of the research in application to business practices and implications for social change. I shared my reflection and made recommendations including a recommendation for future research. I concluded with the findings and recommendations, and application to professional practice and implications for change.

Section 2: The Project

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies some IT leaders used to improve employee engagement in the IT industry. Section 2 contains a description of my role as the researcher, the justification for the chosen research method and design, the eligibility criteria for participants, and the sampling method I used to narrow the targeted population to the sample population. I discuss the data collection instruments, techniques, and organization procedures. I explain the data analysis procedures, the process of maintaining ethical standards, and how I proposed to ensure credibility, confirmability, and dependability and attain data saturation.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies some IT leaders used to improve employee engagement. The targeted population consisted of IT leaders in three technology companies in Chicago, Illinois, because they have successfully implemented strategies to improve employee engagement. The implications for positive social change included the potential to improve employee engagement that resulted in workers who were more creative and productive in their personal lives outside of the workplace. Engaged employees enjoy higher levels of job and personal satisfaction, experience less turnover and absenteeism, and lead lives that are more productive outside of the workplace than disengaged workers (Leary et al., 2013). Increased employee engagement might result in improved local economic stability, lower local unemployment rates, and increased community volunteerism.

Engaged employees tend to volunteer more time and resources for community service projects than disengaged employees (Krasnopolskaya et al., 2015).

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary data collection instrument (Silverman, 2015). In my role as the researcher, I was the primary data collection instrument. As a multiple case study research, I had two forms of data collection for this study, which were semistructured interviews and a review of organizational documents. I collected, analyzed, and interpreted the data from participants and organizational documents. The role of the researcher is to select qualified participants, provide the participants with an overview of the study, and answer any questions prior to the commencement of the interviews (Watkins, 2017). In my role as the researcher, I was the interviewer. I used open-ended questions to allow the participants an opportunity to share strategies to improve employee engagement and organizational profitability.

As I prepared to collect the data, to eliminate bias, I set aside any preconceptions related to any professional experiences in the IT industry related to the topic. I have worked in the IT industry for over 15 years in Chicago, Illinois. I did not have any personal or professional relationship with members of the targeted population. Bias in the research is a significant threat to the validity and credibility of the results of the data collected (Kepes, Banks, & Oh, 2014).

Fiske and Hauser (2014) stated the importance of preparing the interview questions in advance to adhere to the protocols outlined in *The Belmont Report*. The basic ethical principles included in *The Belmont Report* are (a) respect for persons, (b)

beneficence, and (c) justice (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). I obtained approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) before beginning data collection. I complied with all ethical guidelines of *The Belmont Report* as mandated by Walden University. For conducting the interviews, I established an interview protocol to ensure fair and equal treatment for each participant to mitigate any bias (see Appendix A).

Confidentiality of the data was essential, and I was the only person with information from the participants. As the researcher, I protected and ensured the rights of the human participants. I mitigated bias and avoided viewing data through a personal lens or perspective by setting aside any preconceptions about the research topic. I minimized bias by not selecting friends and professional colleagues as participants. Researchers should avoid relying on subjective, personal viewpoints to mitigate biases (Silverman, 2015). Qualitative researchers face the potential for inserting personal bias into the data because of the open dialog and interaction with the participants (Watkins, 2017).

To gain the trust of the participants, I secured personally identifiable information. During the study, I built a working relationship with the business leaders who served as participants. Researchers should use proven data collection techniques and adhere to strict research protocols to reduce the risk of researcher bias (Bansal & Corley, 2012). I collected and analyzed the data to ensure an accurate interpretation of the findings of the research study.

The participants' knowledge of the IT department was critical to gaining rich data. The participants demonstrated what strategies influenced employee engagement and

what methods they used to ensure organizational adoption. Lastly, the participants had at least 1 year of proven success with strategies that improved employee engagement. I contacted the participants initially via e-mail and followed up with individual discussions to explain the study using the informed consent form. In addition to interviews, I reviewed organizational records regarding the strategies the leaders use for engaging employees. The data collection occurred on the site of the selected organizations. I obtained site permission through a letter of cooperation signed by the companies' authorized official.

Participants

Researchers must select participants who possess the requisite knowledge to answer the overarching research question of a study (Connelly, 2014). Some of the principles in selecting the participants included a purposeful sampling of participants, an in-depth study of IT leaders who have successful strategies to improve employee engagement as participants, and the selection of the participants who provided a good fit to the conceptual framework (see Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014). The eligibility criteria were an IT leader (a) of a technology organization; (b) located in Chicago, Illinois; and (c) who had successfully implemented strategies to improve employee engagement. Employee engagement was critical to the research because employee engagement's effects on organizational commitment, competitiveness, and performance (Mahajan & Sharma, 2015). The participants successfully implemented or used employee engagement strategies aligned with the research question. IT leaders who met the criteria were eligible to participate in the study.

Participants in this study were three IT leaders who used employee engagement strategies to improve employee engagement. In this study, I focused on three IT organizations from the geographical area of Chicago, Illinois. The targeted population consisted of IT leaders in three technology companies in Chicago, Illinois, who had successfully implemented strategies to improve employee engagement.

I e-mailed or called the owners or authorized individuals of the organizations to gain access to the participants. I sent an invitation to each participant with a detailed explanation of the nature of the study and requested authorization so that IT leaders in the organization could participate in the research study. I obtained permission to review company documents through the owner signing a letter of cooperation and confidentiality agreement. I reviewed company records and documents such as employee engagement surveys, productivity reports, employee evaluations, policies regarding employee engagement, and written memos related to IT leadership strategies to improve employee engagement in order to identify potential participants who met the eligibility criteria. I requested the authorized agent of the organization to sign the letter before I reviewed all documents. I obtained the contact information of potential participants from the company website, and I utilized professional networking for organizations that were successful in the IT industry. I obtained approval from the Walden University IRB before I contacted any potential participants. After I received the IRB approval and signed a letter of cooperation, I e-mailed the informed consent form to all participants.

To create a trusting and positive working relationship with the participants, I transparently discussed the nature of the research and answered any questions by the

participants through e-mail or telephone. Breitkopf et al. (2015) noted researchers must be clear in their intentions and guiding standards while developing a working relationship with each of the participants. As the researcher, I was honest, respectful, and trustworthy to develop a strong comfort level with the participants. Bradshaw, Atkinson, and Doody (2017) noted participants are more likely to disclose information if they know the researchers will keep their identities confidential. I worked to ensure the participants were comfortable, and I did not exercise any influence to control the participants of the study. Tourangeau (2017) noted the importance of establishing trust with the participants. I established trust with the participants by providing an outline of the purpose of the study, full disclosures of voluntary participation, and confidentiality procedures. Coding is a way to protect the participant's identity. A naming scheme is designed to ensure the confidentiality of participants and organizations (Bradshaw et al., 2017). I coded the names of participants and the research organizations as PLIT1, PLIT2, and PLIT3. I used a USB drive to protect all e-mails and data. All data remains password protected and secured for 5 years. After 5 years, I will destroy all research records. I am the only person who has access to the data as well as the password.

Research Method and Design

The research method for this study was qualitative. Qualitative research aligns with an exploration of the dynamic relating to improving employee engagement in the IT industry because participants can freely express their experiences in their own words through face-to-face interviews, which are more intimate and open-ended (Bradshaw et al., 2017). Researchers use the qualitative method to gain insight from participants to

discover pattern and themes (Bradshaw et al., 2017). A qualitative approach was appropriate for this research study.

Research Method

The research method for this study was qualitative. A qualitative researcher conducts an in-depth investigation of people, groups, or organizations to explore experiences in a real-world setting (Yin, 2018). A qualitative researcher is a primary instrument for data collection and data analysis (Tang, Yang, & Tang, 2015). The researcher can be responsive to the data and create a deeper understanding of a phenomenon by communicating with the participants. The participant's words convey the data and demonstrate what the researcher has learned about the topic of the study (Flemming, Graham, McCaughan, Angus, & Bauld, 2015). As the researcher, I studied the patterns and meanings while not allowing any personal or professional biases to affect the integrity and validity of the data. Tang et al. (2015) noted researchers must explore the experiences and address the problem in the research study. A qualitative approach was an appropriate research method for this study because the purpose of the study was to explore the strategies used by participants. Qualitative researchers collect data from the views, perceptions, knowledge, and interpretations of the participants (Watkins, 2017).

Yakubovich et al. (2015) posited that researchers who conduct quantitative method research focus on statistical measurements and analysis of numerical data to test a theory or a relationship. Qualitative research is the best method for a researcher to explain a particular phenomenon and the results of the study (Masue, Swai, & Anasel, 2013). McCusker and Gunaydin (2014) noted the quantitative research method is ideal

for a researcher to gather numerical data and explain a phenomenon through findings of the statistical data. Using a quantitative research method, the researcher focuses on examining the relationship and differences between two or more variables (Yakubovich et al., 2015). Because I was not collecting numeric data to test the significance of the relationship between variables, the quantitative method was not suitable for this research study.

Mixed-method research is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods used by researchers (Goldman et al., 2015). The mixed-methods approach is suitable when the researcher needs to use both qualitative and quantitative methods to understand the research topic and answer the research questions (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2014). Mixed-method researchers recognize the merits of using multiple sources of evidence to complete a research study (Freshwater, 2015). I was not using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to collect and analyze data; therefore, a mixed-method approach was not appropriate for this research study.

Research Design

The research design for my study was a multiple case study. Researchers use a case study design for the exploration of a specific phenomenon and the investigation and description of the event within a contemporary context (Yin, 2018). A researcher who conducts a multiple case study seeks to gain insight from the participants and typically collects data using face-to-face interviews, document review, and observation (Raeburn, Schmied, Hungerford, & Cleary, 2015). A multiple case study adds more diversity of the data and better data saturation and different insights relevant to the study (Henry & Foss,

2015). I selected the multiple case study design because I sought to collect diverse and rich data through interviews and document reviews regarding a real-world problem within a contextual setting.

A qualitative researcher can conduct research using a phenomenological design to gain insight and discover a more profound meaning (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014). Gaining an understanding of how personal experiences can influence the behaviors is the goal of the researcher using a phenomenological design (Koopman, 2015). I sought to explore leadership strategies to improve employee engagement, not lived experiences; therefore, the phenomenological approach was not an appropriate design for this study.

An ethnography researcher focuses on studying cultural groups in a natural environment over an extended period to understand the lived experiences of the individuals (Eika et al., 2015). The researcher using the ethnographic design seeks information regarding the cultural aspects of a group of people or an organization (Yusop & Correia, 2014). Eika et al. (2015) noted that an ethnographic study is an all-inclusive evaluation of individuals in a routine manner, which involves ongoing observation of the participants to collect data. As the researcher, I did not propose to study the culture of a group of people through emersion in their setting; therefore, the ethnographic design was not suitable for this study.

Narrative inquiry researchers focus on the life events and stories of participants (Sahni & Sinha, 2016). Researchers conducting a narrative inquiry focus on the people's experiences, which allows for observations of the relationship between the researcher and

the participation in a deeper understanding of the experiences of the participant. The narrative inquiry was not an appropriate approach for my research study.

After careful review of each qualitative design, the case study design was best for my research to explore leadership strategies to improve employee engagement in the IT industry. I interviewed each participant for 45-60-minutes to ensure accurate and valid data that align with the research question to achieve data saturation. In qualitative research, the best way to ensure the dependability and credibility of the data is through reaching data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The process of achieving data saturation can vary, and there is no universal saturation model (Fusch & Ness, 2015). There are some basic principles, which ensure a certain level of high data saturation. Data saturation occurs when the information collected offers no new coding, themes, or information related to the research (Fusch & Ness, 2015). To answer the research question, the researcher must identify the appropriate population and determine the sample size (Robinson, 2014). As described by Yin (2018), case study researchers use methodological triangulation via the collection of information from all of the participants as well as other sources to corroborate the experiences and ensure the quality of the research.

Population and Sampling

To determine the appropriate population and sample size, the researcher must ensure the data aligns with the research question (Robinson, 2014). The population for this study was IT leaders in three technology companies in Chicago, Illinois. Eligible participants were IT leaders who implemented strategies to improve employee

engagement. The researcher uses sampling in a qualitative research study to explore the variations of experiences (Gentles, Charles, Nicholas, Ploeg, & McKibbin, 2016). The selection of participants for this study occurred through purposeful sampling.

Gentles et al. (2016) posited that researchers use purposeful sampling to target participants who have knowledge and experience in a specific area of study. Patton (2015) noted that purposeful sampling allows the researcher to select participants who have significant information on the research topic. Researchers use purposeful sampling to choose participants who meet specific eligibility criteria, who possess the knowledge needed to answer the research question, and because of who they are and what they do (Baur et al., 2015). Purposeful sampling is a process used by researchers to narrow a larger targeted group of individuals to the sample population (Patton, 2015). Baur et al. (2015) stated that purposeful sampling is an effective means for researchers to select participants who possess the greatest information about the phenomenon under study. Researchers conducting a qualitative case study often use purposeful sampling to identify their sample population (Guilcher et al., 2013). I used purposeful sampling to narrow the targeted population to my sample population. Researchers use snowball sampling to obtain future participants from existing participants, yet the risks breaking the confidentiality of participants (Yingling & McClain, 2015). I did not use snowball sampling to avoid the potential break of participant confidentiality. Census sampling is appropriate when the number of people in the targeted population equal the number of people needed in the sample population (Lacy, Watson, Riffe, & Lovejoy, 2015). I did

not use census sampling because the targeted population exceeded the number of people in the sample population.

The participants must meet the eligibility criteria to participate in this research study. The eligible participants consisted of three IT leaders from three different organizations that have applied leadership strategies to improve employee engagement in the area of Chicago, Illinois. Leaders who do not meet the criteria are not eligible to participate in the research study. Yin (2018) noted that researchers could conduct a case study with small sample size. Researchers conducting a limited scope case study use a small sample population to acquire rich data and reach data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Three IT leaders comprised the sample population for this research study.

Benham (2017) conducted a qualitative case study with IT employees in the public sector regarding employee engagement, using a sample size of four participants. Benson (2017) explored the strategies leaders use to improve employee engagement, using a sample size of two participants. Simmons (2018) conducted a qualitative case study to explore strategies business leaders use to increase employee engagement, using a sample size of three participants. My research study was similar to Benham, Benson, and Simmons; therefore, three participants was an appropriate sample size for this research study.

The process of achieving data saturation can vary; no universal saturation model exists (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation occurs when the information does not provide new coding, themes, or information related to the research (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Failure to achieve data saturation can affect the validity of the research. To achieve data

saturation, I interviewed three participants at three different IT organizations. I gathered data from multiple participants regarding the same research study. To enhance the reliability and achieve data saturation, triangulation is a method I used along with documents, direct observations, and member checking. To ensure the dependability and accuracy of the data, I digitally recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed the interview data from all resources gathered during the interview. In this study, the goal was to have rich data of the participant's experiences of engagement in improving employee engagement within the IT industry.

Guo, Lu, Wu, and Zhang (2015) noted data saturation could determine the purposeful sample size; however, no true relationship exists between sample size and data saturation. Data saturation occurs when the researcher collects all the data within the research that is relevant to the research question. The appropriate sample size was one that was adequate to address the research question but not so large that the amount of the data does not allow an in-depth analysis. Researchers conducting a qualitative method study do not need a large number of participants to achieve data saturation (Yousefi & Shahgholian, 2015). I reached data saturation when additional data collection efforts resulted in no new information or themes, and enough information existed to replicate the study.

In-person interviews are critical for the researcher to build and maintain rapport with interviewees to enable the gathering of rich, in-depth data (Farooq & de Villiers, 2017). Conducting interviews at the participant's convenience was beneficial to the researcher and participants (Chaney, Barry, Chaney, Stollefson, & Webb, 2013). The

interviews took place in a private conference room reserved for the organization. The room was conducive to provide a comfortable and quiet area free from distractions for the interview. Interviewing in a private area provided the participant's confidentiality along with a signed site premises form by the participant at the organization. Connelly (2014) noted the importance of research that has integrity and transparency while safeguarding the rights of the participants during the interview.

Ethical Research

Ethical standards in research were essential to protect participants in a study. Kirsten, Wordsworth, and du Plessis (2017) noted a renewed focus on ethics in research to enhance practices and ethical behaviors to ensure compliance requirements and credibility in research. As the researcher, I created procedures to mitigate any harm to participants and ensured the confidentiality of the data provided by participants. As part of the process, I e-mailed an informed consent form to leaders who met the eligibility criteria for participants in the study. The leaders provided informed consent by replying, *I consent* to the e-mail, or I accepted a signed hard copy of the informed consent form just before the start of the interview. The informed consent form contained clear language regarding the participants' right to withdraw. Wilson (2016) noted the informed consent form would indicate that participation will not involve any monetary incentives, and they can withdraw from the study at any time.

Participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any point in the research for any reason or no reason. Participants can withdraw from the research study verbally or in writing without any risk to themselves or their organization. Participants who

choose to withdraw from the research will have the same protections concerning each participant and any data provided up to the point of withdrawal.

I informed participants that they would not receive any monetary incentives to participate in the study. The informed consent form indicated that participants would not receive any compensation to participate. Members of the targeted population who met the criteria as an IT leader in Illinois who had successfully implemented strategies to improve employee engagement were eligible to participate in the research study.

To ensure ethical standards, I obtained approval from the Walden University IRB before contacting the participants or collecting data. The Walden University IRB approval number was 12-05-18-0595860. I sent an inquiry to the participants who meet the eligibility criteria in the doctoral study. To ensure confidentiality and privacy, I coded the names of participants and the research organizations as PLIT1, PLIT2, and PLIT3. I used coding to ensure that each participant has an identifying code while protecting his or her identity from disclosure. As the researcher, I created precautions to protect the participants' identity to reduce the participants' reluctance to participate in the research study. Adams et al. (2015) noted that researchers must ensure the confidentiality of participants as a fundamental guide in ethical research. Implementing precautions to protect participants' identity is important to reduce participant's reluctance when agreeing to participate in the research study is critical (Adams et al., 2015).

I presented a letter of cooperation and confidentiality agreement and an informed consent form to those who agreed to participate in the study. To maintain participants' privacy, I will store all informed consent forms, letters of cooperation and confidentiality

agreements, research notes and journals, and collected data in a paper form or on a password protected USB drive in a fireproof safe in my home office for 5 years after completing the research study. I am the only person who has access to the files. After 5 years, I will shred paper documents and physically dismantle the USB drive to destroy data, so that the data are not recoverable.

Data Collection Instruments

I was the primary data collection instrument in this research study. A researcher is the primary data collection instrument in a qualitative research study (Yin, 2018). A data collection instrument is a tool a researcher uses to gather, understand, and explain the results of the study (Goodman, Cryder, & Cheema, 2012). The data collection instruments I used in this research study include semistructured interviews, document review, company archival documents, and taking reflective notes during the interview. Researchers use interviews and organizational documents related to their research questions to gather information for analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Medhurst and Albrecht (2016) noted previous researchers studying employee engagement in the workplace used semistructured interviews and organizational documents as the data collection instruments. I used semistructured interviews as a data collection instrument.

Qualitative researchers use a variety of in-depth interview formats, which depended upon the research design, and the alignment of the research question (Yin, 2018). Bott et al. (2017) noted the importance of researchers using semistructured interviews to gather rich data from participants. Morse and Wilson (2016) posited that the researcher could probe at a deeper level the responses of the participants and gain rich

data from each participant using a semistructured format which is the format I used in this study. To allow for flexibility within a standard interview protocol, I used the interview protocol in Appendix A to conduct semistructured interviews with the participants. Researchers use an interview protocol to outline the procedures and rules to conduct research and to ensure data collection, analysis, and reporting to stay absorbed on the research (Yin, 2018). I used an interview protocol as I conducted the semistructured interviews to maintain consistency in the interview process (see Appendix A). Each interview consisted of seven open-ended interview questions covering the participant's strategies, and insight of the IT leaders need to improve employee engagement. Researchers who use semistructured interviews allow participants to be flexible when answering the interview questions (Wethington & McDarby, 2015). I asked each participant to expand their responses to identify and collect additional details and rich data. The interview questions aligned with my research question. During the semistructured interviews, I collected data from the participants who, in response to the interview questions, shared their strategies, insight, and knowledge to improve employee engagement.

After collecting and interpreting data, researchers can return to participants requesting feedback on the interpretations using member checking (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Researchers use member checking to verify the accurate collection and interpretation of data and to increase the reliability and validity of the study findings (Morse & Wilson, 2016). After completing and analyzing data from each semistructured

interviews, I returned to each participant for member checking and obtained verification and clarification related to the data collected and the interpretation of the data.

After I received IRB approval, I purposefully selected prospective participants from the targeted population. I e-mailed an informed consent form to leaders who met the eligibility criteria for participants in the study. The leaders provided informed consent by replying, *I consent* to the e-mail, signing, and returning the informed consent form, or by signing the form before the start of the interview. The informed consent form contained clear language regarding the participants' right to withdraw. Wilson (2016) noted the informed consent form would indicate that participation will not involve any monetary incentives, and participants can withdraw from the study at any time. I scheduled face-to-face, semistructured interviews, which lasted between 45-60 minutes. I collected in person from each participant who agreed to participate by providing informed consent. After collecting the consent forms, I answered any additional questions each of the participants may have related to the study.

Member checking is a means for the researcher to verify the accuracy of the data collected during the interview. Member checking is a process researchers use to allow for restating the participant's responses and asking the participants to verify the accuracy of the information (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). To use member checking, researchers transcribe the interviews, write up a summary of the information and data collected during the interviews, and present the summary to the participants for validation (Birt et al., 2016). Qualitative researchers can collect data from relevant documentation in the form of organizational policies, announcements, meeting minutes,

websites, and e-mail communication (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The data sources for triangulation include semistructured interviews of IT leaders and organizational documents. I gained access to the participants via e-mail or a telephone call to the company owner or authorized person to send an invitation to participate with a full explanation of the purpose of the study and request permission to allow IT leaders within the company to participate (see Appendix B). I obtained permission to review company documents through the owner signing a letter of cooperation and confidentiality agreement. I reviewed company records and documents such as employee engagement surveys, productivity reports, employee evaluations, policies regarding employee engagement, and written memos related to IT leadership strategies to improve employee engagement to identify potential participants who met the eligibility criteria. The authorized agent of each organization signed the letter of cooperation before I can begin collecting data and reviewing all organizational documents. I obtained the contact information of potential participants from company websites, and I utilized professional networking for organizations who were successful in the IT industry. The organizations' documents included information about strategies IT leaders used to improve employee engagement that promoted engagement through training, recognition, and rewards programs within each organization.

Data Collection Technique

In qualitative research, researchers can use several techniques for collecting data (Yin, 2018). Researchers collect data from a qualitative research study to collect rich, in-depth data to answer the research question (Wardale, Cameron, & Li, 2015). Qualitative

case study researchers explore information by collecting data from a variety of sources, which could include interviews, and review of company documents (Landrum & Garza, 2015). I conducted semistructured interviews for my research study and reviewed organizational documents related to my research question: What strategies do some IT leaders use to improve employee engagement? I stated that the questions are open-ended and the approximately time for the interview. I thanked the participant for taking the time out of their schedule to participate in the research study. I began the interview with an introduction and purpose of the interview. Afterward, I set the stage and introduced the main interview topic in a quiet room at the organization. I shared that the study is voluntary and they have a right to withdraw from the interview at any time. I ensured that I obtained the informed consent before starting the interview. I ensured the participants agreed to the interview and approved of the audio recording and any note taking to ensure the accuracy of the data during transcription. Next, I asked each of the seven interview questions, while looking for nonverbal cues. I paraphrased as needed and asked follow-up probing questions to get more in-depth responses as I continued to meet all of the requirements in the interview protocol (see Appendix A).

As the researcher, I used a semistructured interview format during the interviews with each participant. Marshall and Rossman (2016) commented that researchers use semistructured interviews to allow for more flexibility for the participants to respond to the interview questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I used a variety of techniques to collect data using semistructured interviews. I scheduled face-to-face interviews with an agreed upon date, time, and location with the participants. I selected meeting spaces that

ensured effective interviews with minimal disruptions. The interview protocol is a guide the researcher used to explore the leadership strategies IT leaders used to improve employee engagement (see Appendix A). Researchers use an interview protocol to maintain structure during the interview process (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Researchers use the interview protocol to ensure the interview questions align with the research questions. The researcher uses the interview protocol, which allows for feedback from the participant (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). As the researcher, I followed the interview protocol as outlined in Appendix A. Each of the interviews lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. I took reflective notes during the interviews to document any nonverbal responses from the participants to the interview questions or probing follow up questions.

In my doctoral research, I used reflective journaling, which is a tool for collecting data. Researcher uses a reflective journal to record personal thoughts and experiences and as well as reflections on the learning (Pucher, Candel, Krumeich, Boot, & De Vries, 2015). During each interview, I took notes on key comments and any nonverbal expressions during each interview. After each interview, I thought about the information to identify themes and patterns from what I observed. I identified the key themes that align with the research question. To have good data collection, I used the following interview techniques. The researcher ensured the recording device is operational. Bott et al. (2017) noted that the participants' information is accurate to transcribe for validity and reliability of the data collected from the participant. During the interviews, I took notes of the responses and any observations that I deemed important during data analysis that could be beneficial to common themes and triangulation of participants' responses.

As the researcher, I maintained neutral expressions during the interview to avoid any influence on participants responses. I asked one question at a time to make sure the participant answered each question to describe knowledge regarding implementing leadership strategies to improve employee engagement. I made sure each participant answered the specific questions; I asked probing questions if additional clarity was needed to ensure the question was answered or to ask follow-up questions as needed to ensure a successful interview. I began with an explanation of the interview. I used a multiple-case study on leadership strategies for improving employee engagement within the IT industry. I interviewed senior leaders directly responsible for employee engagement within the IT industry. Organizations could have an increase in productivity and performance by developing strategies to increase employee engagement within the IT industry. I sent a letter to the participant stating the topic of the interview along with a list of interview questions and requested their permission on the attached document. I asked the participant for their contact information. I asked the participant to schedule a conference room in their organization for the interview in a quiet place to eliminate disruptions.

Landrum and Garza (2015) noted the importance of the researcher's ability to collect data from a variety of sources. As a qualitative researcher, I collected data from a variety of sources, which included interviews, observations, and company documents (Landrum & Garza, 2015). I used internal documents, which included meeting minutes, announcements, policies and procedures, and electronic communication. I searched publicly accessible information about the organizations in news reports.

Advantages and disadvantages of data collection techniques exist, such as a researcher gaining rich data through open dialog with participants; conversely relying on nonverbal communication gleaned during an interview instead of what the participant verbally stated (Chi, Bulage, Urdal, & Sundby, 2015). Another advantage of the semistructured interviews as a data collection technique was the collected data is in real time, coming directly from the participant (Birt et al., 2016). Disadvantages can include bias; data may be unavailable, and time-consuming (Hannes, Heyvaert, Slegers, Vandenbrande, & Van Nuland, 2015). Information on the organization's website may not be current or verifiable, which is a disadvantage to the researcher. A disadvantage may exist with participant's validating the data, which could affect the credibility of the results, and this demonstrates why member checking is critical to the reliability of the data (Birt et al., 2016).

Semistructured interviews and IT organizational documents were the data collection instruments for this research study. Researchers conduct semistructured interviews to allow flexibility for the participants to describe strategies, provide insight, and share their knowledge of the phenomenon (Wethington & McDarby, 2015). I engaged the participants in semistructured interviews to improve the richness of the data.

I did not conduct a pilot study. Some researchers may choose to conduct a pilot study to test the validity and reliability of the interview protocol and to improve the quality of the study within a larger study to follow (Mocorro, 2017). I was conducting a limited scope study and did not need to conduct a preliminary study to test the method and procedures in preparation for a larger research study.

After approval from the Walden University IRB and collecting other relevant information, I scheduled interviews with the study participants. At the start of each participant interview, I reminded the participants of their rights as noted in the informed consent form. I recorded all interviews with the authorization of each participant and conducted reflective journaling. I used member checking to provide the participants an opportunity to validate the data collected.

Bellhouse, Crebbin, Fairley, and Bilardi (2015) noted that researchers use member checking to provide the participants with an opportunity to verify the accuracy of data received through interviewing. Study participants received the preliminary findings and interpretations to assess the accuracy of the data. I used member checking to allow the participants the opportunity to review my interpreted summary of their interview responses to validate my interpretation. During member checking the participants may not recognize their perspective from the summary of the researcher (Birt et al., 2016). Researchers perform member checking with each participant to eliminate the potential for researcher bias by actively involving the participant in checking and confirming the data collected (Birt et al., 2016). I scheduled a date and time to meet with each participant and allowed them to review the summary, and I asked if I interpreted their responses correctly, and then asked what other information can each participant add. The goal was to check for accuracy and ensure that I captured the participant's thoughts accurately while ensuring I reached data saturation. I used a password-protected laptop to store electronic copies of all participant interview files to create interview transcripts for analysis.

Data Organization Technique

Data organization was important to manage collected data. The researcher must maintain access to the collected data, the research materials, and the data analyzed during the interviews to protect the integrity of the data (Yin, 2018). During the data collection process, the researcher should record their interpretations of the data. A core function of research is data process, data analysis, and data collection (Won Gyoung, 2017). I used reflective journaling to record the initial interpretations during the data collection process. As the researcher, I identified and learned a new concept through journaling and review of the journals (Hoover, Strapp, Ito, Foster, & Roth, 2018). I organized the data by the themes using NVivo 12 and within folders in Microsoft Word and Excel. I recorded, saved, and transcribed the interviews to ensure the accuracy of the data collected.

I used the journal noting my initial thoughts of each of the participants to develop ideas related to the data collected and the analysis process. Researchers use reflective journals to improve the reliability and validity of the data (Taylor & Thomas-Gregory, 2015). Reflective learning through journaling can lead to critical thinking during data analysis (Bahmani, 2016). I created a log for each participant to keep track of the data from the participants during the face-to-face interview, member checking follow-up interviews, and my reflective notes as part of the research. When collecting data from semistructured interviews, I noted the date, time, and other relevant information for the data collected from each participant. The data I collected were to develop the codes and themes in the research process for each participant. Within the NVivo 12 software, I created a database for all of the data, codes, and themes. In NVivo 12, I organized the

files for each participant. I scanned in any typed notes, data from the Internet, and screenshots of data and included within NVivo 12. I included the code I used for each participant and added the audio recordings by date and time in NVivo 12 for easy access to all data related to the study (Yin, 2018). I included any data typed in Microsoft Word and Excel within NVivo 12 as well to ensure all data were located in one centralized location for security and confidentiality of the data.

Qualitative researchers use pseudonyms to privacy of participants while enriching the information by adding quotes and examples to their study results from each of the participants (Goldberg & Allen, 2015). I password protected the data files in Microsoft Word and Excel to ensure confidentiality. Marshall and Rossman (2016) encouraged researchers to choose a pseudonym for participants and the organization to protect the privacy of the individuals and the organization. To maintain participants' privacy, I stored all informed consent forms, letters of cooperation and confidentiality agreements, research, notes, and journals, and collected data in a paper form or on a password-protected USB drive in a fireproof safe in my home office for 5 years after completing the research study. Coding was a way to protect the participant's identity. Carmichael and Cunningham (2017) noted that the process of taking data from the interviews and coding in segments could result in explanations and assertions of the data analyzed. A naming scheme was designed to ensure the confidentiality of participants and organizations (Bradshaw et al., 2017). I coded the names of participants and the research organizations as PLIT1, PLIT2, and PLIT3. I used a password-protected USB drive locked in my home office to store all e-mails and data. I will destroy all research records after 5 years.

Data Analysis

Qualitative researchers use methodological triangulation to determine the completeness of the data by verifying results from multiple data sources (Flick, 2016). Researchers conducting a qualitative case study collect data from multiple sources of evidence to engage in methodological triangulation (Yin, 2018). Qualitative data analysis is a process a researcher use to extract rich data from the raw data with analytical tools and techniques to produce rich, credible, and reliable data for the study (Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, & Redwood, 2013). Researchers can generate new insights from the data through using critical thinking, logical analysis, and credible data analysis procedures (Yin, 2018). During the data analysis process, I used methodological triangulation to compare and contrast interview data with documentation data. To analyze data, I used Yin's (2018) five-step data analysis process of compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding.

Compiling Data

Qualitative researchers gather information in an orderly manner to identify and group patterns and themes for data analysis (Bengtsson, 2016). A phased, step-by-step approach to data analysis was important to ensure robust results (Yin, 2018). Hossain (2017) noted the following steps in data analysis, which are the research questions, any propositions, the units of analysis, logical linking of the data, and criteria to interpret the findings. I compiled the interview data, documentation data, and observation notes into labeled files in preparation for disassembling the data. I compiled data from the digital recorder, manually transcribed from this study by importing the responses of the three IT

leaders; my notes were taken during the interviews and my observations, and all organizational documents, which answer the research question.

Disassembling Data

Disassembling the data involves dividing the compiled data into fragments and labels. Qualitative research is significant to have a deeper examination of the experience from the data collected (Watkins, 2017). The data coding process included identifying patterns, themes, and categories of all of the data compiled by using NVivo 12 software into specific codes. Gale et al. (2013) noted researchers label the codes to break down data into small segments to identify key topics of each category of data. The research question was the starting point to organize and analyze the data to determine the codes, patterns, themes, and categories.

Reassembling Data

Reassembling data involved clustering and categorizing the labels in sequences and groups. Palinkas et al. (2015) noted that the researcher should use data analysis software such as NVivo or others to assist in reassembling the data. Saxena (2017) noted that reassembling the data is a crucial part of the process as the transcripts and reassembly of the data from voice to text help clarify the participant's words I eliminated repetitive ideas while reassembling the data. I created clusters of related information to develop conceptual themes. I validated the content of the information and themes. I created textual and structural descriptions to present the findings and eliminated repetitive ideas. I created clusters of related information to develop conceptual themes to validate the content of the information and themes. I created textual and structural

descriptions, combined the textural and structural descriptions, and presented the findings. Farooq and de Villiers (2017) noted the research must consider the nature of the data they are reassembling to ensure the data addresses the research question.

After transcribing and reviewing the interview data and documents, I applied the codes to the data and stored this information in the software NVivo 12. I used NVivo 12, a software tool, to analyze the transcribed notes and to identify the codes and generate themes. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) noted that coding is analysis because codes are labels that the researcher uses to assign meaning to phrases and sentences from the transcribed notes. Miles et al. commented that coding is the process of differentiating and combining the transcribed data to allow for reflection of all of the data collected from all participants. I started with a list of codes from the conceptual framework and my research questions.

Interpreting the data required creating the narratives from the sequences and groups. Gale et al. (2013) noted the methodology to analyze data should include the transcription of the data, knowledge of the interview, data coding, and developing the analytical framework. I interpreted the data using NVivo 12 software to group data related to leadership strategies used to improve employee engagement within the IT industry. Interpreting the data in a manner to ensure the data makes sense while showing a connection with the data, the literature, and the conceptual framework of the study. Organizing the data into patterns, themes, and groups allow the research to be the process of validating the data through methodological triangulation. Methodological triangulation is a process researchers use to crosscheck one set of data with the second set of data

(Fusch & Ness, 2015). Researchers use methodological triangulation to add trustworthiness to the findings of a research study (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). As the researcher, member checking was key to accomplishing methodological triangulation in my research study by verifying the accuracy of the data, observations, notes, and organizational documentation during the participant interviews.

Concluding Data

Bennett and McWhorter (2016) noted that the rich, accurate data collection and the relationship between the data allow for a conclusion of the findings. The researcher completes a systematic data analysis by describing the findings of the study, after data assessment. Al-Htaybat and von Alberti-Alhtaybat (2017) posited that the findings could illustrate the topics of the research which emerged from the data analysis. The conclusion of the data to develop the patterns and themes into conclusions and findings. My objective for my research study was to understand the leadership strategies to improve employee engagement within the IT industry. As a qualitative researcher, I asked open-ended interview questions to collect the data and to explore in-depth meaning with the study. Flood et al. (2017) noted that the theme and content that results from the analysis assists the researcher in identifying themes and concepts to summarize and evaluate the data. In my research study, I used multiple sources of data to achieve triangulation. I concluded the data analysis by ensuring the data was in alignment with the transformational leadership theory. I identified the common themes, which are the strategies that the participants successfully used to improve employee engagement.

Software Plan

Watkins (2017) noted advancing research and practice is challenging, and researchers must use tables, spreadsheets, and word processing software to develop all-inclusive data to more manageable data to analyze data systematically in a step-by-step I used Yin's (2018) five-step process as the data analysis process. I organized the data by the themes using NVivo 12 and within folders in Microsoft Word and Excel. I recorded, saved, and transcribed the interviews to ensure the accuracy of the data collected. I used Microsoft Word and Excel to transcribe the data and made a note of any possible patterns before transferring to the NVivo 12 to identify patterns, themes, and categories in the data collected. Part of the data analysis was using NVivo 12 for accurate storing, retrieval, and interpretation of the data. I used NVivo 12 software to detect patterns and themes presented in the research study. I audio-recorded each interview, transcribed verbatim, and coded the data using NVivo 12 software. Researchers use NVivo 12 to organize data based on the established categories (Oliveira, Bitencourt, dos Santos, & Teixeira, 2015).

I used the journal noting my initial thoughts of each of the participants to develop ideas related to the data collected and analysis process. Researchers use reflective journaling to improve the dependability and credibility of the data (Taylor & Thomas-Gregory, 2015). I created a log for each participant to keep track of the data from the participants during the face-to-face interview, member checking follow-up interviews, and my reflective notes as part of the research. When collecting data from semistructured interviews, I noted the date, time, and other relevant information for the data collected from each participant. The data I collected was to develop the codes and themes in the

research process for each participant. Within the NVivo 12 software, I created a database for all of the data, codes, and themes. In NVivo 12, I organized the files for each participant. I scanned in any typed notes, data from the Internet, and screenshots of data and include within NVivo 12. I included the code I used for each participant and added the audio recordings by date and time in NVivo 12 for easy access to all data related to the study (Yin, 2018). I included any data typed in Microsoft Word and Excel within NVivo 12 as well to ensure all data located in one centralized location for security and confidentiality of the data. Carmichael and Cunningham (2017) noted that the process of taking data from the interviews and coding in segments could result in explanations and assertions of the data analyzed. A naming scheme is designed to ensure the confidentiality of participants and organizations (Bradshaw et al., 2017).

Key Themes

Cronin (2014) posited the significance of identifying patterns from the data collected. Qualitative researchers use an iterative data collection process in which the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data are simultaneous (Watkins, 2017). The goal of the theme development was to assist the researcher in gaining a deeper understanding of the leadership strategies used to improve employee engagement. Data analysis should result in a rich description of the themes. I focused on the strongest themes, which aligned with the research questions, successful leadership strategies used to improve employee engagement, and the literature within the research study. Researchers use reliability and validity to demonstrate the rigorousness of the study

(Noble & Smith, 2015). Lastly, I used the findings of this study to confirm or refute the findings of similar studies published in 2017-2018.

Reliability and Validity

Qualitative researchers seek dependability of the data instead of reliability (Noble & Smith, 2015). A goal of a researcher conducting a qualitative method study is to present findings that are credible, confirmable, and trustworthy, whereas the goal of a researcher conducting a quantitative research study is to present finding with a high degree of reliability and validity (Kihn & Ihantola, 2015). The qualitative researcher seeks dependability, credibility, and confirmability of the findings to allow future researchers to have confidence in the finding regarding transferability to other cases or settings (Minn, 2015).

Dependability

Researchers conducting a qualitative study refer to dependability as the stability of the data and the findings (Bengtsson, 2016). To ensure dependability, researchers use a strict interview protocol to ensure a consistent collection process of interview data, engage participants in member checking to validate the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation, and reach data saturation (Morse & Wilson, 2016). To achieve study dependability, the researcher should provide a detailed explanation of the steps applied during the research study, which will allow other researchers to replicate the study and possibly transfer the findings to another case or setting (Moon, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams, & Blackman, 2016). Member checking is a quality control method that qualitative researchers should use to validate the data retrieved from the participants to

ensure the dependability of the data (Fusch & Ness, 2015). When researchers use member checking to increase the dependability of the collected data, they also improve the dependability of the findings (Harvey, 2014). I strived for dependability by collecting rich data from participants through interviews and member checking, using an interview protocol (see Appendix A), adhering to ethical research standards, and reaching data saturation. I meticulously documented the data collection process in a research journal, base the results of this study on the data collected while mitigating my personal biases, and strived to present dependable, credible, and confirmable findings.

Credibility

In qualitative research, researchers strive for credible findings (Moon et al., 2016). The credibility of the research study is a reflection of the researcher's accuracy in reporting the data associated with the research study. The researcher must establish confidence in the trustworthiness of the findings (Bengtsson, 2016). Moon et al. (2016) noted that researchers ensure credibility by collecting dependable data, using a strict interview protocol, engaging participants in member checking, and accurately interpreting and reporting the findings. Researchers conducting a qualitative study improve the credibility of the findings through collecting data from multiple sources and using methodological triangulation (Morse & Wilson, 2016). As the researcher, I focused on achieving research rigor and credibility to validate the trustworthiness of the study by collecting dependable data using semistructured interviews and documentation review. I used an interview protocol to ensure a consistent interview process (see Appendix A), engage the participants in member checking to allow them the opportunity to validate the

accuracy of my interpretation of their interview response, and engage in methodological triangulation to crosscheck the interview data with the documentation data.

Confirmability

In qualitative research, the researcher increases confirmability by ensuring that the participants provide additional details or explanations during the semistructured interviews and with member checking to establish validation of researcher's interpretations by the participants (Moon et al., 2016). The researcher establishes confirmability in the research study when the findings are a reflection of the views of the participants and not of the researcher (Cope, 2014). Confirmability of the findings improves when researchers use multiple sources of evidence for data, followed by the use of methodological triangulation to compare and contrast the diversity of the data (Morse & Wilson, 2016). When a future researcher deems the findings of a research study are relevant and transferable to another case or setting, the future researcher confirms the findings of the original study (Cope, 2014). I ensured confirmability of the findings of this study by asking probing questions during the semistructured interviews, using member checking, collecting additional data from company documents, and engaging in methodological triangulation.

Transferability

Transferability is a vital aspect of the application of research findings and refers to the point in which the phenomenon or results described in the study apply to future research (Moon et al., 2016). Transferability in a qualitative study requires the researcher to demonstrate the meaning of the study to the participants and nonparticipants to show

how the finding of the research study could apply to other research settings (Moon et al., 2016). To achieve transferability of the findings in a qualitative study, the results must have meaning to individuals who are not involved in the research study, and when the readers can identify with the study's findings regarding their own experiences (Cope, 2014). Researchers improve the opportunity for future researchers to transfer the findings of their study through using an interview protocol, meticulously adhering to documented data collection and analysis techniques, and reaching data saturation (Yin, 2018). I ensured the dependability of the data and the credibility of the findings so that future researchers might have the opportunity to transfer the findings of this study to other settings or cases. I used an interview protocol (see Appendix A) to adhere to the proposed data collection and analysis procedures, triangulate the data, and strive for dependable, credible results to improve the prospects of transferability of the findings.

Data Saturation

Fusch and Ness (2015) noted data saturation occurs when additional data collection efforts result in no new data, themes, or information. As the researcher, I reached data saturation when additional data collected resulted in no new information, themes, or patterns. To answer the research question and reach data saturation, the researcher must identify the appropriate population to collect data (Robinson, 2014). Researchers conducting a qualitative case study use an interview protocol to maintain a consistent data collection process, ask probing questions during the interviews, engage in member checking, collect data from multiple sources, engage in methodological triangulation to corroborate the data, and continue data collection efforts until no new

data, theme, or patterns emerge (Yin, 2018). Morse and Wilson (2016) noted that researchers use member checking to verify the accurate collection and interpretation of all the available data from participants. Researchers who use a multiple case study add more diversity to the data, which improves the credibility of the saturated data (Henry & Foss, 2015). I used an interview protocol to ensure I asked the same questions for each interview participant (see Appendix A). I asked probing questions during the interviews. I engaged the participants in member checking. Lastly, I used methodological triangulation of multiple sources of data to achieve data saturation. I continued data collection until no new themes or patterns emerged, reaching data saturation at the conclusion of the third interview.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I discussed the purpose of the study. I discussed the role of the researcher, and the data collection technique and process. I, as the researcher, provided information on the data organization and the analysis process and provided information on the research dependability, credibility, and confirmability. I conducted semistructured interviews with three IT leaders in Chicago, Illinois. The purpose of the interviews was to gather data on the engagement strategies that IT leaders used to improve employee engagement. To achieve data triangulation, I reviewed secondary documentation from the organization's internal documents, public documentation, and any observations of the participants during the interviews.

Section 3 included the purpose of the study, the research question, the research findings, any relevance to the business community, application to business practices, and

the research implications for social change. I made recommendations for any actions and any future research.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies some IT leaders use to improve employee engagement. The targeted population consisted of IT leaders in three technology companies in Illinois who successfully implemented strategies to improve employee engagement. I collected data from three IT leaders located in Illinois by conducting semistructured, face-to-face interviews and reviewing relevant company documents. I explored employee engagement through the lens of the transformational leadership theory developed by Burns (1978) and Bass (1985). The findings were consistent with Burns's and Bass's transformational leadership theory. Transformational leaders exhibit behaviors that support and empower employees to increase levels of engagement. Bass expanded Burns' original theory, adding that transformational leaders influence followers through trust, honesty, and loyalty. A leader can make a positive difference in a person's life (Bass, 1985). Participants used the leadership strategies of compensation and benefits, performance management, and recognition to improve employee engagement in the IT industry.

Presentation of the Findings

The research question for this research study was as follows: What strategies do some IT leaders use to improve employee engagement? I conducted semistructured interviews with three participants who consented to the interviews and who agreed to have their answers recorded. Participants represented three IT organizations in Illinois. The participants responded to seven interview questions, including probing questions

related to leadership strategies used to improve employee engagement. After transcribing the recordings, I engaged each participant in member checking to validate my interpretation of their responses and obtain additional information along with organizational documents.

I used the data from the document review to validate the participant's answers. The documents included compensation and benefits plans, performance management workbooks, staff performance evaluation plans, recognition policies, incentive policies, socialization plans, and company websites. Upon completion of the three interviews and review of relevant company documents, I attained data saturation as no new themes, patterns, or information emerged. I used NVivo 12 software to organize data and to identify themes based on Yin's (2018) five-step approach to data analysis, which are compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding the data. I searched for broad themes that emerged based on the research question. During the process of compiling and analyzing the data, three key themes emerged from the data collected that were common to all interview participants. During data analysis, I identified subthemes and discussed them in the findings. To protect the identity of the IT leaders, I used the code names of PLIT1, PLIT2, and PLIT3. In Table 1, I display the three key themes.

Table 1

Themes: Strategies Used to Improve Employee Engagement

Strategy	Percentage of use by organizations
Compensation and benefits strategy	100%
Performance management strategy	100%
Recognition strategy	100%

Theme 1: Compensation and Benefits Strategy

All of the participants used a compensation and benefits strategy as a condition of employment. Organizational leaders must have a compensation and benefits strategy to improve employee engagement (Chapman, Sisk, Schatten, & Miles, 2018). Leaders can use compensation packages to attract new talent and retain employees through compensation and employee engagement initiatives (Chapman et al., 2018). PLIT1 acknowledged, “We look at the rewards system to motivate employees.” Employees want compensation, which includes the following: pay, benefits, bonuses, and commissions (Reynolds, 2019). Leaders use employee engagement initiatives, such as skills training, advancement, and promotions, to stay competitive (Chapman et al., 2018). PLIT2 noted, “We look at intrinsic values such as appreciating and respecting everyone, and we offer performance bonuses as part of compensation and benefits package to engage employees.”

Antony (2018) noted that compensation, benefits, and employee rewards are effective methods to foster employee engagement. PLIT3 stated, “To improve employee engagement, we offer commission potential of a 15% bonus for any IT services sold to our clients.” Engagement improves when organizations take a holistic approach to compensation, benefits, and professional development (Antony, 2018). PLIT3 acknowledged the importance of a holistic approach. “We offer employees a comprehensive employee compensation and benefits program which includes health insurance, paid holidays, vacations, and sick days, a 401K after 2 years of employment, a 401k matching program, and tuition reimbursement.” Compensation alone is not enough to engage and retain employees; organizations must have a holistic combination of tangible and intangible compensation and benefits strategy including the reward to have a successful business strategy (Ojwang, 2019).

I reviewed a formal offer letter for employment to verify PLIT3’s statement related to creating a holistic approach to a compensation and benefits strategy that meets the needs of the employees to improve employee engagement. The findings align with the behaviors exhibited by transformational leaders who support and empower their employees. Transformational leaders develop individualized relationships with employees, which could lead to increased levels of engagement (Yaslioglu & Erden, 2018). This finding aligns with Bass’s (1985) and Burns’s (1978) transformational leadership theory because leaders use incentivized strategies to influence followers through trust, honesty, and loyalty.

This key finding confirms the research of Raina and Kalse (2018) who noted that compensation and benefits strategy is an important driver to improve employee engagement. The key theme of compensation and benefits strategy aligns with Burns's (1978) transformational leaders' theory by linking shared values, fair and respectful treatment, and fair compensation (Lips-Wiersma, Haar, & Wright, 2018). In Table 2, I display the three key subthemes that emerged from the compensation and benefits strategy.

Table 2

Subthemes of Compensation and Benefits Strategy

Subthemes of compensation and benefits strategy	Percentage of use by organizations
Salary compensation	100%
Health benefits	100%
Education and training benefits	100%

Salary compensation. All participants sought to motivate and engage new employees by conveying their compensation and benefits package. Reynolds (2019) stated that employees want compensation that includes overtime, bonuses, and commissions, which is a basic motivator for employees. To entice potential employees, some organizations use compensation as a way to engage potential and current employees (Reynolds, 2019). Organizations should consider compensation as part of an overall company strategy to engage employees (Ojwang, 2019). PLIT1 noted, "Our leadership

pays attention to the reward and recognition system aligned with business strategy.” Compensation and rewards are ways for leaders to engage top performers (Ojwang, 2019). PLIT1 acknowledged, “We look at rewards systems to incentivize and motivate employees.” The leader may also use compensation as an employee retention and engagement strategy because an attractive compensation package to improve employee engagement (Ojwang, 2019). Some organizations offer a performance-based compensation plan where financial rewards link to the “pay-for-performance plan” in addition to a competitive salary of the entire organization as a way to engage employees (Chapman et al., 2018). PLIT2 noted, “We award performance bonuses to employees quarterly, annually, and as we see it is warranted.”

Some organizational leaders had success with incremental compensation to engage and retain employees. They may offer to match the pay structures of competitors to stay competitive (Chapman et al., 2018). Engaging employees through a rewards program can improve employee engagement by having a holistic view of compensation and total rewards program (Antony, 2018). PLIT3 stated, “We offer our employees a starting salary with incremental increases after 90 and 180 days of employment. We offer commission potential on any services or goods sold along with a comprehensive and holistic employee benefits plan.” These findings align with Burns’s (1978) transformational leadership theory because leaders use incentives to transform the organizational culture and improve employee engagement.

Health benefits. All participants sought to motivate and engage employees through health benefits, such as offering health insurance to employees. Antony (2018)

noted the best way to motivate and engage employees is through their health and well-being via health benefits to employees and their dependents. Nandy and Basu (2018) noted that organizational leaders use employee benefits to improve and enhance employee motivation and engagement across the organization; the most common benefits are medical, disability, life insurance, and retirement. PLIT3 acknowledged, “We offer a holistic compensation and benefits strategy which includes cash compensation along with health insurance covering 74% or a maximum \$250 per month for employees throughout company-sponsored benefits package.” Employee engagement is achievable through a holistic view of compensation and benefits plans, which include health benefits (Antony, 2018). The organization recognizes that a strong compensation package, which includes health benefits, can create a competitive advantage (Chapman et al., 2018). Pay and benefits, such as health benefits, improve employee engagement (Raina & Kalse, 2018).

I reviewed the employee contract letter to verify PLIT3’s statement that a holistic compensation and benefits strategy is critical to improving employee engagement that aligns with organizational strategies. These findings align with Burns’s (1978) transformational leadership theory because leaders use incentives to transform the organizational culture and improve employee engagement.

Education and training benefits. All participants elaborated on key aspects of education and training, such as offering opportunities to enhance skills through certifications, education, and training. Raina and Kalse (2018) noted that the engagement of employees through training and development is important, and selecting the right employees for the right jobs relates to employee engagement. Reynolds (2019) noted that

leaders use training and education programs to engage employees through career opportunities. PLIT1 acknowledged, “Individuals must continue to learn and stay current in technology.” PLIT2 noted, “In our staff performance evaluation we focus on the creation of a development plan through coaching, training, developmental assignments, or additional support or resources.” This finding confirms the research of Reynolds who noted that training has the potential to result in higher productivity and more engaged employees, which could benefit the organization.

PLIT3 stated, “We offer cross training to show employees every part of the organization.” Training can have a positive impact on employee performance and engagement when the skills transfer to the job (Chapman et al., 2018). A link exists between training and employee performance and engagement, and organizations are likely to continue to invest in training to benefit the employee and the organization (Chapman et al., 2018). PLIT3 noted, “We offer employees educational and training benefits to learn more about technology through certifications, which we pay for the education, and we assist in payment towards degree programs for our employees.” The employees must know what the leader expects of them to achieve goals; leaders must provide employees with training, tools, and resources to perform their jobs and achieve organizational goals (Antony, 2018). Organizational leaders who invest in their employees through training assist in the development of skills so employees can move to the next level in their career (Antony, 2018). The findings confirm the research of Antony (2018) who noted that the development of employee skills through an education and training strategy is important in engaging employees. The organizational training

program can help an employee develop personally and professionally. Organizations that offer education and training improve the skills of the employee; the education also benefits the organization (Antony, 2018).

I reviewed the performance management workbook of PLIT1, the employee-staff-evaluation form of PLIT2, and the employee formal offer letter to verify PLIT3 information related to education and training benefits strategy is critical to improving employee engagement that aligns with organizational strategies. Burns (1978) and Bass (1985) found that transformational leaders guide people to align with organizational values and objectives. These findings align with the transformational leaders focus on understanding and supporting the needs of employees through engagement in mutually stimulating relationships (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978).

Theme 2: Performance Management Strategy

All participants used a performance management strategy to improve employee engagement. Organizational leaders must have a performance management strategy and practices for their employees to improve employee engagement (Antony, 2018). Employee engagement is essential to achieving organizational goals, and leaders must develop strategies to engage their employees (Caniëls et al., 2018). PLIT1 acknowledged, “Leaders look at the rewards system to incentivize and motivate employees. PLIT1 stated, “Leaders pay attention to the reward and recognition system aligned with business strategy, which can create a strategy around engagement.” Caniëls et al. (2018) noted that transformational leaders enhance employee engagement, which resulted in better job performance. PLIT2 noted, “We award performance bonuses quarterly, and we give a

discretionary bonus as see it warranted” for well-performing employees. This finding confirms the research of Caniels et al. who noted a confirmed link exists between work engagement, transformational leadership, and employees’ performance. PLIT3 stated, “As leaders, we allow employees to learn every part of the business as we recognized that engagement is huge, and when employees learn everything, they are a better person, employee, and engineer.” This finding confirms the findings of Bakker and Albrecht (2018), in that engagement is a strong indicator of employee and organizational outcomes because engaged workers show strong performance.

PLIT1 noted, “Performance management is not a one and done, performance management is continuously improving, and leaders create a career path and succession planning to grow skillsets and capabilities of the employees to keep the employees engaged and improve employee engagement.” I reviewed a performance management workbook and a staff performance evaluation document related to performance management. I used these documents to validate the data collected during the interviews from PLIT1 and PLIT2 regarding how they improved employee engagement. Bakker and Albrecht found that employee engagement is a predictor of how employees and organizations will perform, and leadership is essential to employee engagement. In Table 3, I displayed the four subthemes that emerged from the performance management strategy.

Table 3

Subthemes of Performance Management Strategy

Subthemes of performance management strategy	Percentage of use by organizations
Performance appraisal	100%
Performance bonus	100%
Training and skill building	100%
Socialization	100%

Performance appraisal. All participants elaborated on key aspects of the performance appraisal process, such as having an annual performance appraisal of their employees. PLIT1 acknowledged, “Leaders look at a performance management system to set individual and organizational goals, and performance management must be aligned with rewards and recognition to drive a certain behavior.” A performance appraisal is a tool that can assist leaders in ensuring that employees meet the objectives, which may add value to the organization and organizational goals (Pegulescu, 2018). PLIT2 noted, “Leaders measure effectiveness by creating standards, employee performance reviews and matching with team members in the organization. Our leaders measure month to month, and each year. Also, we use performance reviews as part of engaging and recognizing employees.” All the participants used performance appraisals as a tool for innovation and achievable outcomes to validate decisions related to compensation and rewards. Leaders must ensure that the objectives for employees must be achievable, clear,

and measurable (Pegulescu, 2018). This finding confirms the researcher of Pegulescu (2018) who noted the use of performance appraisals could assist employees in their professional development as well as achieving organizational performance objectives.

All participants noted that performance appraisals could lead to a couple of outcomes for the employees related to intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic outcomes relate to a sense of achievement and feeling as if the employee has contributed to something useful within the organization (Pegulescu, 2018). Extrinsic outcomes relate to positive achievements such as promotions, recognition, and rewards. Pegulescu (2018) noted that since 2018 leaders are using performance appraisals and a promotion and rewards tool to motivate employees. PLIT1 and PLIT2 noted the outcomes are related to ensuring employees achieve goals, and recognizing employees through promotions and rewards. Performance appraisals are a method to invest in employee's professional development while clarifying and defining the performance expectations, training and development needs, and career counseling between leaders and employees (Pegulescu, 2018). PLIT2 noted, "Our leaders develop employees personally and professionally."

I reviewed the performance management workbook to verify PLIT1's statement that evaluating employee performance and contribution to the vision and strategic goals is critical to improving performance aligned with organizational strategies. I also reviewed PLIT2's staff performance evaluation, noting the existence of alignment with performance and rewards that achieve organizational goals. These findings align with Burns's (1978) transformational leadership theory because leaders use incentives to transform the organizational culture and improve employee engagement.

Performance bonus. All participants elaborated on offering performance bonuses on the spot, quarterly, or annually. Antony (2018) noted that organizations must motivate leaders to engage their employees through performance criteria and rewarding engagement through incentive programs to improve employee engagement. PLIT1 acknowledged, “Employees do what they are incentivized to do. Leaders pay attention to the reward system that aligns with a business strategy which creates a strategy around engagement.” The quality of leadership has proven to be a strong factor in engaging and motivating employees, and organizations must attract the type of leaders with good pay packages with demonstrated abilities to engagement employees. Employees can become engaged via rewards such as performance bonus and recognition programs to enhance engagement. PLIT2 noted, “We give performance bonuses, we have promotional opportunities, and we give a discretionary bonus as we see it warranted.” This finding confirms the research of Antony (2018) who noted that organizational leaders who have flexible and clearly defined paths for career development and strong recognition policies based on performance differentiate themselves as well as influencing higher levels of employee engagement. PLIT3 stated, “We have a commission bonus of 15% of all services sold to clients.” Employee engagement is a primary factor for enhancing job performance (Antony, 2018).

Training and skill building. All participants elaborated on training and skill building through professional development. Mokhber et al. (2018) noted the development of employees through training could create a challenging and coaching work environment. PLIT1 acknowledged, “Leaders must work on developing an environment

of continuous improvement through training.” Antony (2018) posited that organizational policies and strategies are favorable to employee growth and development, which enhances employee engagement. PLIT2 stated, “Everyone wears multiple hats within the company, and the strategies that are most effective for improving employee engagement are roundtable discussions and team building.” Employees must understand the policies and strategies so the employees can achieve the goals through training and resources required to perform their job.

Employees must have a sense of control of the developmental opportunities within their organization (Antony, 2018). PLIT3 noted, “We offer employees education to learn more about technology, and the company pays for the training and education classes.” PLIT3 acknowledged, “He creates an environment that has an open door policy where employees can come to him about anything. Engaged employees may be more open to seeking job training by asking for feedback and asking for opportunities for development by working on new work projects when there is an engaged work environment (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). PLIT1 and PLIT2 noted the importance of policies and strategies that include training and development to engage employees. Leadership is a critical factor in grooming leaders who can engage employees by providing opportunities for career development and employee recognition within the organization.

All participants noted the importance of a performance management strategy to improve employee engagement. This finding confirms the research of Caniels et al. (2018) who noted that performance management strategy is an important strategy a leader

could use to improve employee engagement. Training and skill building through professional development aligns with transformational leadership theory by Burns (1978) and Bass (1985) who noted that transformational leader's do more than motivate their followers and that transformational leaders help to grow their followers.

Socialization. All participants used socialization to improve employee engagement. Coldwell, Williamson, and Talbot (2019) noted socialization within organizations improves employee's propensity to have a respect for the company's values, recognize expected behaviors, and gain social knowledge for engaging in jobs roles within the organization. PLIT1 acknowledged, "We create opportunities for employees to get to know one another socially." Coldwell et al. noted organizational performance improves through formalizing socialization tactics, such as training programs for hiring managers and criteria within employee performance appraisals that develop employee values. Socialization is an ongoing process in the life of the employee at the organizational level, which can contribute to improved performance, and a more engaged employee (Coldwell et al., 2019). PLIT2 noted, "Socializing improves employee engagement." Leaders who create employee friendly policies can have a positive impact on social support, and perceived fairness and values can result in engaged employees (Antony, 2018).

Organizational leaders who have corporate social responsibility programs allow employees to feel they are part of a social initiative and this could improve employee motivation and engagement (Antony, 2018). Leaders use socialization to allow employees to receive support within a work environment through acquiring knowledge

and skills that could improve engagement (Cranmer, Goldman, & Booth-Butterfield, 2017). PLIT3 stated, “We mix personal and business by having an open door policy. Also, we have a very social environment which includes events and dinners for employees and leader to get to know one another while building better relationships.” Effective leaders use socialization to communicate their missions and social significance of their job role, which could increase employee motivations and engagement (Sobral, Furtado, & Islam, 2017).

I reviewed PLIT1’s website, which stated, “One of the foundational guiding principles of our organization is improving the community and world in which we live. Our commitment to our community is fulfilled through acts of charitable and civic donations, volunteerism, mentorship, internships, and employment opportunities through socialization.” These findings align with the Bass (1985) and Burns (1978) transformational leadership theory because leaders and followers contribute to each other’s advancement to higher levels through the following constructs: (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration (Burns, 1978).

Theme 3: Recognition Strategy

All participants used a recognition strategy to improve employee engagement. Ghosh (2018) noted that employee engagement practices such as recognition strategies implemented by leadership within organizations are a great way to engage employees by recognizing their work. PLIT1 acknowledged, “We pay attention to the recognition system to ensure it aligns with the business strategy. At our annual employee meeting, we

recognize employees and give out certificates based on positive feedback from our leaders and clients.” Crespi-Vallbona and Mascarilla-Miro (2018) posited recognition relates to training and promotional opportunities, and developmental opportunities are a form of recognition for talented employees. IT professionals noted that recognition and career progression are important in their engagement within their organization (Crespi-Vallbona & Mascarilla-Miro, 2018).

Career development is the second most impactful way to engage and recognize employees (Antony, 2018). The organization can differentiate itself by having an effective recognition program, and clearly defined career paths can generate higher levels of employee engagement (Antony, 2018). Raina and Kalse (2018) noted that employees remain engaged when they are recognized and have opportunities for career development. PLIT2 noted, “We recognize employees when they have performed well and not only when we have our quarterly or annual evaluations.” Ojwang (2019) posited that the organization must place importance on recognition and career advancement opportunities to engage employees. Reynolds (2019) stated that the employee wants recognition and career opportunity at work. Organizational career opportunities would include training and education programs (Reynolds, 2019). Organizations who recognize their employees offer training classes as part of their recognition program (Reynolds, 2019). PLIT3 stated, “We recognized our employees through commission potential when services purchased from a client.” Reynolds noted that employees want recognition formally and informally for their hard work.

I reviewed the performance management workbook to verify PLIT1's statement that they recognize and celebrate the success of their employees. I reviewed the staff performance evaluation form to verify PLIT2's statement that employee recognition contributes to the strategic goals, which are critical to improving engagement, and recognition strategies should align with organizational strategies. I also reviewed PLIT2's staff-performance-evaluation form, noting that recognition of well-qualified staff is a key aspect of the evaluation. Transformational leadership is a model that provides support and recognition, for employees to see beyond their self-interests through inspiration (Crespi-Vallbona & Mascarilla-Miro, 2018). Transformational leaders exhibit behaviors that support and empower employees to increase levels of engagement (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). In Table 4, I displayed the two subthemes that emerged from the recognition strategy.

Table 4

Subthemes of Recognition Strategy

Subthemes of recognition strategy	Percentage of use by organizations
Career path	100%
Promotions and advancement	100%

Career path. All participants elaborated on key aspects of career development to enhance employees, skills and facilitate the employees to move to the next level in their career. One driver of employee engagement is career development and recognition

(Antony, 2018). PLIT1 acknowledged, “We create a culture of engagement, and we work with employees on their career path and succession planning to grow their skills. We want people to grow and have marketability beyond the organization’s needs and goals.” Career development opportunities are essential for an organization to have as part of their employee engagement strategy (Antony, 2018). Raina and Kalse (2018) noted that career progression drives engagement. Organizations who offer mentoring will enhance an employee’s knowledge and help them identify career priorities while engaging the employees (Antony, 2018). A leader must establish and communicate a clear career path and highlight opportunities for employees (Antony, 2018).

Syed and Tariq (2018) stated that an organization must develop a succession plan and provide career development programs and opportunities to engage employees. PLIT2 noted, “In our staff performance we identify potential professional growth and career advancement opportunities.” Leaders at the human resource management level must recognize the importance of career development as part of their efforts to foster the continuous development of the workforce (Syed & Tariq, 2018). Raina and Kalse (2018) noted that employees want career growth, job satisfaction, and engagement at work, and that employee engagement is an important element in the relationship between the leader and the employee. PLIT3 stated,

Employee engagement is 100% interaction with employees and the leaders. We show our employees every part of the business to allow them an opportunity to cross train to learn every job role within the organization. We pay for technical certifications, and we pay a portion towards a college degree.

Reynolds (2019) noted that what employees want from work are career opportunity and recognition. Career opportunity consists of feedback, development, training and education, and promotions (Reynolds, 2019). Career opportunities and development must also align with engagement and recognition programs (Reynolds, 2019).

I reviewed PLIT1's website, which stated, "We respect our employee's career goals, we offer team building, we offer merit-based incentives, and we keep our employee's aspirations in mind to grow together." PLIT1 also noted on their performance management workbook, "Performance measures are a means for career development." These findings align with Bass's (1985) and Burns's (1978) transformational leadership theory because leaders use transformational leadership when they use their vision, personality, behaviors to influence, inspire and motivate followers to perform at levels previously deemed impossible.

Promotions and advancement. All participants elaborated that opportunities for advancement is critical to employee engagement. Promotions and advancement are associated with every dimension of employee engagement (Antony, 2018). PLIT1 acknowledged, "We want our employees to grow their skill sets and capabilities which make our employees more valuable." Crespi-Vallbona and Mascarilla-Miro (2018) stated that career plans offer opportunities for IT employees which is important to keep the IT employees engaged. PLIT2 noted, "We have advancement opportunities, and we have promotional opportunities. We have instances where we have invested in employees and spun-off another company with employees." Crespi-Vallbona and Mascarilla-Miro posited that promotional opportunities link to performance assessment of each employee.

Ojwang (2019) noted that employees remain engaged and developed through opportunities for promotion. PLIT3 stated, “We develop our employees personally and professionally; we do not want to limit our employee’s abilities.” Top performers want jobs and careers with organizations that focus on employee growth and internal advancement (Ojwang, 2019). Career opportunities and development must also align with engagement and recognition programs (Reynolds, 2019). When employees experience achievement in their work, they have a greater feeling for recognition and advancement and promotion in their career (Mohammed & Alem, 2018).

I reviewed PLIT1’s website, which stated, “We respect our employee’s advancement and development goals, and we keep our employee's aspirations in mind.” I reviewed the staff performance form to verify PLIT2’s statement that they identify potential professional growth for career advancement, and they will further the employee’s career and developmental goals. These findings align with Bass’s (1985) and Burns’s (1978) transformational leadership theory because transformational leaders focus on understanding and supporting the needs of employees through engagement in mutually stimulating relationships.

Applications to Professional Practice

The applications of this study are meaningful to employee engagement strategies within organizations. The findings were significant to leadership strategies to improve employee engagement and possibly lead to a competitive advantage for organizations. The primary objective of this study was to explore successful leadership strategies used to improve employee engagement within the IT industry. Leaders in the IT industry

might apply these findings to strengthen relationships between employees and leadership within an organization by enhancing performance and developing a competitive advantage. The data from my research supported and added to prior and existing knowledge related to employee engagement. The findings of the study align with transformational leadership theory. Burns (1978) noted that leaders who demonstrate the characteristics of a transformational leader could have a positive impact on employee engagement through trust, honesty, and loyalty.

Leaders in the IT industry might apply the findings of this study to use a compensation and benefits strategy to improve employee engagement by providing a competitive compensation and benefits package for each IT employee. When employees believe that their organization's compensation structure is not competitive, they become dissatisfied with their pay, which could harm employee performance and engagement (Chapman et al., 2018). When employees believe their organization's pay structure is fair, competitive, and rewarding, engagement in the organization improves (Raina & Kalse, 2018). Raina and Kalse (2018) noted that pay and benefits are factors that drive employee engagement. Leaders noted that highly dissatisfied individuals are also highly disengaged. Findings of this study indicated that when IT leaders align a competitive compensation and benefits strategy with IT employees' abilities and strengths, the employee is less likely to experience job dissatisfaction, thus improving employee engagement. A competitive compensation and benefits package is a winning business strategy (Ojwang, 2019). Leaders may use the findings of this study to improve

organizational business practices by developing human resource guidelines or training materials for IT leaders on the best practices to improve employee engagement.

IT leaders might apply the findings to implement or improve their performance management strategy to improve engagement by using performance management as a coaching mechanism to grow and develop the employee's skills. Engaged employees are considered to be committed to their organization's goals and values, which could contribute to improved employee performance and organizational success (Caniëls et al., 2018). A performance management strategy is a powerful tool which could significantly impact individual and organizational performance while ensuring that employees improve productivity, improve professional development, and create more engaged IT employees. When employees believe their organizational leaders have a performance management strategy for their professional development, the employees could become more engaged. The feedback provided within performance management can create an environment of accountability for the employees and the IT leaders along with developing an improvement plan, a performance action plan to ensure employees reach their professional goals while maintaining engagement as they see improvements and move towards their goals. IT leaders can use performance management in a way that embeds engagement through policies and practices toward training and development and socialization to improve employee engagement (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018).

The findings of this study indicated when IT leaders align a performance management strategy with IT employee's abilities and strengths by creating a working environment in which engagement, innovation, and commitment exist, employee

engagement improves. IT leaders might use a performance management strategy as a tool to assess and award employee performance through training and development, through improving individual performance-related salary, through encouraging and motivating individual and teamwork assignments, and through identifying the potential for career development and advancement within the IT organization. Leaders may use the findings of this study to improve organizational business practices by developing human resource guidelines related to performance management for IT leaders on the best practices to improve employee engagement.

Business leaders in the IT industry could apply the findings to improve employee engagement by providing a recognition strategy that has employee engagement practices such as recognition to enhance engagement. When employees believe that their organization does not recognize their work, they could become disengaged. Ford et al. (2015) stated that disengaged employees lack energy or thought and are not actively engaged and fully participating in their role at work. When employees believe the organization recognizes their work, the employee could become empowered and more engaged within their organization (Pegulescu, 2018). When IT leaders care about the achievement of the organization's mission and goals, they also have a focus on recognizing their employees who contributed to the organization's success. Gilbert and Kelloway (2018) noted that recognition could promote an environment of improved employee engagement. IT leaders could attract and retain employees through a recognition system, which could improve employee engagement (Mohammed & Alem, 2018). When employees believe that their organizational leader recognizes their

achievement of challenging tasks via an organizational recognition strategy, higher levels of employee engagement exists (Mohammed & Alem, 2018).

The findings of this study indicated that when IT leaders align a recognition strategy with IT employees training and promotional opportunities, the employee is less likely to experience disengagement from lack of recognition, thus improving employee engagement. Organizations could develop a recognition strategy, which could include training, and professional development opportunities to engage employees and make employees enthusiastic about the organization. Leaders may use the findings of this study to improve organizational business practices by developing formalized recognition strategies for IT leaders on the best practices to improve employee engagement.

The findings of this research study may help to fill in the knowledge gaps related to the type of successful strategies that may improve employee engagement. Researchers have used transformational leadership theory as a lens to understand the importance of leadership in employee engagement. Transformational leaders influence followers through trust, honesty, and loyalty (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). The research findings indicated that IT leaders used a variety of leadership strategies to improve employee engagement. IT leaders could improve employee engagement by offering a competitive compensation and benefits strategy, by using performance management as a coaching tool to grow and develop employees, and by creating a recognition program that recognizes, empowers, engage, and advance professional development.

All participants confirmed the transformational leadership theory relates to leadership strategies that result in improved employee engagement. Transformational

leaders and followers contribute to each other's advancement to higher levels through the following constructs: (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration (Burns, 1978). Burns (1978) and Bass (1985) found that transformational leaders guide individuals to align with organizational strategies, values, and goals.

Implications for Social Change

The potential implications for positive social change within the IT industry are more engaged employees who are more productive and motivated professionals in their personal lives. Engaged employees experience reduced absenteeism, high engagement, and lead dynamic personal lives (Leary et al., 2013). The potential implications for social change within the IT industry could include leaders who can apply employee engagement strategies to develop leadership opportunities and programs throughout the organization. A more engaged IT workforce can lead to more community development activities. IT leaders may use improved employee engagement as a means of social change in communities by becoming an active partner in assisting in the development of the community through employment opportunities. Engaged employees could result in enhanced local economic stability, lower local unemployment rates, and improved community volunteerism. Community-based organizations could benefit because engaged employees may volunteer more time and resources for community service projects (Krasnopolskaya et al., 2015). IT leaders who hire employees from the surrounding communities could contribute to lowering the unemployment rate within those communities, which would result in improved community volunteerism, more

disposable income, and an improved quality of life for IT employees and their families with a strong compensation and benefits plan.

IT leaders who have a formalized performance management program create opportunities for IT employees to improve their skills, obtain training and educational opportunities, and have advancement opportunities within the organization. IT leaders who have recognition programs can create a more engaged employee by recognizing and rewarding IT employees in areas such as financially, training, and advancement and promotional opportunities. Social change could have a positive impact on IT employees through tangible and intangible improvements, which also could have a positive impact on society as a whole. Increased employee engagement might have a beneficial impact on the organization's performance, could elicit positive social change for communities and community-based organizations through improved local economic stability, lower local unemployment rates, and increased community volunteerism and a healthy working environment that reflects the social impact internally and externally (Ghosh, 2018).

Recommendations for Action

Researchers consider employee engagement as critical to the IT leader's success (Mete et al., 2016). IT leaders should consider if the findings of this study align with current business strategies to improve employee engagement. Based on the findings of this research study, I make several recommendations for IT leaders to consider when employing leadership strategies to improve employee engagement, which can lead to increased performance and profitability. Employee engagement within an organization improves through transformational leaders who engage their employees.

Organizations must have leaders who can create a vision and strategy others are willing to follow. Kouzes and Posner (2002) linked worker motivation and satisfaction to employee engagement. Leaders who align their activities, behaviors, and leadership style with the constructs of the transformational leadership theory can improve employee morale (Burns, 1978). Leaders must create a culture of employee engagement. Leaders must recognize the importance of creating a competitive compensation and benefits strategy, which includes salary, benefits, commissions, skills training, advancement, and promotions to engage employees. Antony (2018) noted that leaders should create a holistic approach in their compensation and benefits strategy using a combination of tangible and intangible items to improve employee engagement by having a successful leadership strategy. Leaders must have a successful implementation of an effective performance management strategy to improve employee engagement. Leaders should consider using a performance management strategy by creating a rewards system with incentives to improve job performance and engage employees.

Caniëls et al. (2018) noted the existence of a confirmed link between transformational leadership, employee performance, and employee engagement. Leaders should consider creating performance management and rewards systems where employees are reward quarterly and after working on a challenging and successful project instead of annual performance evaluation. Leaders must recognize that performance management is a system of continuously improving. Leaders should develop a holistic approach to performance management that includes using performance appraisals as a tool for coaching and skill development. A leader should develop a performance bonus

plan and a training and skill building approach to develop and engage employees. Lastly, leaders should have a plan to increase socialization as a way to get to know their employees better to improve employee engagement.

A leader might create a work environment by providing opportunities for employees through career development within the organization. Burns (1978) and Bass (1985) noted that transformational leaders engage and motivate their followers through professional development. IT leaders should not only reward their employees for improving engagement; leaders have to recognize their top performers. Leaders should create advancement and promotional opportunities through training and education programs to engage their employees (Reynolds, 2019). Leaders should exhibit a leadership style such as transformational leadership, which exhibits behaviors that support, recognize, and empower their employees to increase and improve employee engagement.

I intend to submit articles for publication in the *Journal of Workplace Learning*, and Sage Journals: *Journal of Management*, *Journal of Business and Management*, *Journal of Information Technology and Economic Development*, and *Journal of Leadership Studies*. I intend to submit a proposal to present the findings at the *Women in Leadership Series* conference in Chicago, Illinois. I will seek additional opportunities to share the findings of this study with business related forums, organizational training and coaching, and leadership and technology conferences.

Recommendations for Further Research

The results from this research study support prior research studies from 2015-2016 and newer studies from 2017-2018 related to employee engagement. In the research, I explored successful leadership strategies to improve employee engagement. I recommend that future researchers conduct additional research to address the limitations of this study related to the restricted geographical location and the small sample size. Future research should have a larger geographical location beyond Chicago, Illinois. I recommend future researchers use a larger sample size of IT leaders. In the future, researchers should explore leadership strategies via a quantitative method study and include a larger sample size to overcome the limitation of this study regarding transferability of the findings.

Future research could test the significance of the relationships between employee engagement and employee performance, employee engagement, and organizational profitability, and employee engagement and leadership style. The recommendations for further study include conducting additional research with a larger organization, IT organizations only, or a single case study to expand their target population and gather more information. Lastly, future researchers could explore leadership strategies via a mixed-method design related to exploring employee engagement within the IT industry across a larger population in the state of Illinois.

Reflections

My primary goal was to achieve a childhood dream to become Dr. Geneva L. Reed. I have two master's degrees, which I thought would quench my desire to become

Dr. Reed. Now, here I am at the end of a long and meaningful journey. The process was quite challenging, even with two master's degrees, the Doctor of Business Administration degree program was unlike anything I could have imagined. The journey was extremely challenging, yet I loved every moment. I would imagine I would miss the rigor of scholarly research and writing along with my scholarly peers and chair. I cannot truly put into words what I have gained as an individual, a student, a scholar, and a professional. I just know that I am better and grateful. I am a better scholarly practitioner, and I believe my life has changed immeasurably as a result of this journey. I am grateful for having the support of family, friends, scholarly peers, my chair, and faculty for challenging me every step of the way. I have loved every moment of my doctoral research journey. I have a greater appreciation for the term *earned doctorate*. I had to earn every single moment of my journey to become a Doctor of Business Administration.

My doctoral journey became more than just achieving a childhood dream. I found the process enlightening and engaging. I became a better writer, a stronger critical thinker, and a stronger researcher. My skills grew as an active listener, and I became a better student and individual through engaging with my scholarly peers. I have always had strong study habits; however, through this journey, my study habits became more focused which require a much more disciplined approach and use of every available moment to read, write, review, and research. I must admit, as an IT professional, I had some ideas of the causes of low employee engagement; however, while conducting the research, I learned so much more. Because of the learning, I have an open mind, which has minimized any biases I may have had at the start of the research.

One of my regrets is taking off numerous semesters due to work-related projects, which were beyond my control; however, I worked on the research during those times as I had become fully committed to the successful completion of my doctoral research. During this journey, circumstances changed in my professional life, and an opportunity presented itself in which I was able to teach at a PhD granting university courses within the Organizational Leadership Department in the College of Business. This unexpected change has become a blessing, as I am sure my Doctor of Business Administration journey will be instrumental to my personal and professional development and goals as a professor working within higher education. Lastly, as I reflect upon my doctoral journey, I know now I can do anything in life, if I work hard, apply myself, have passion and vision, and enough perseverance to see myself successfully achieving the goal.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, I conclude that IT leaders use (a) a compensation and benefits strategy, (b) a performance management strategy, and (c) a recognition strategy to improve employee engagement within the IT industry. The transformational leadership theory was the conceptual framework for this study. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the leadership strategies that IT leaders use to improve employee engagement. I collected data via semistructured interviews, organizational documents, and publicly available information. The findings in the research study indicated that the compensation and benefits, performance management and recognition were critical elements in the development of leadership strategies IT leaders used to improve employee engagement. The findings and

recommendations resulting from this study might be valuable to IT leaders, human resource managers, and hiring managers for developing leadership strategies to increase productivity, lower absenteeism, improve organizational performance, and reduce turnover, through improved employee engagement. The implications for positive social change include the potential for IT leaders to enhance local economic stability, lower local unemployment rates, and increase community volunteerism through improved employee engagement.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

What I will do to open the interview.	Good afternoon. My name is Geneva Reed and I will conduct this interview as it relates to leadership strategies to improve employee engagement.
Introduce the interview and set the stage - often over a meal or coffee	Interview Question: What strategies do some IT leaders use to improve employee engagement? My Script: Before we begin, I would first like thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to participate in my research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to resign from this interview at any time. I will provide an informed consent form for the participant to sign stating they agree to the interview and that they approve of the audio recording to ensure accuracy of the data during transcription. I will inform the participant that the questions will be open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview. The interview will take approximately 45-minutes; however, the time may vary depending on the time it takes for you to discuss your individualized engagement experiences.
<input type="checkbox"/> Watch for non-verbal queues <input type="checkbox"/> Paraphrase as needed <input type="checkbox"/> Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in-depth	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do you define employee engagement? 2. What strategies do you use to improve employee engagement? 3. What strategy did you find as most effective for improving employee engagement? 4. How do you measure the effectiveness of the strategies to improve employee engagement? 5. What were the key barriers to implementing strategies to improve employee engagement? 6. How did you overcome the key barriers you faced in implementing strategies to improve employee engagement? 7. What additional information would you like to share about strategies you use to improve employee engagement?
Wrap up interview thanking participant	My Script: Thank you very much for participating in this research study. Your participation in this study will assist me in gaining insight on leadership strategies that improve employee engagement within the information technology industry. In a few days, I will return to conduct a follow-up member checking interview to review the transcribed notes, and obtain any additional information you might offer on the follow-up meeting
Schedule follow-up member checking interview	My Script: The follow-up member checking interview will occur on this date and time. Is this convenient for you? If you find you are unable to meet, please contact me to reschedule.