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Strategies Business Leaders Use to Increase Employee Engagement

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Jo Lee

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Walden University
2022

Abstract

Strategies Business Leaders Use to Increase Employee Engagement

by

Jo Lee

MBA, University of Phoenix, 2016

BS, Elizabeth City State University, 1995

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration in Leadership

Walden University

October 2022

Abstract

Fifty-one percent of American workers in the restaurant industry are not engaged or committed to their work, resulting in high turnover. Business owners are concerned with the lack of commitment of employees because there can be a negative financial impact on the business and increased employee turnover. Grounded in the situational leadership theory, the purpose of this multiple case study was to explore strategies business leaders use to increase employee engagement. Participants consisted of four restaurant business leaders in Virginia who implemented strategies to increase employee engagement. Data were collected through semistructured interviews and company websites and analyzed using thematic analysis. The four themes that emerged were: selling, telling, participating, and delegating. A key recommendation for business leaders is to lead by example and incorporate inclusion strategies to recognize the needs of diverse individuals. The implications for positive social change include findings that may help managers create a positive working environment for employees that facilitates their professional growth. The implications for positive social change have the potential to lower turnover among restaurant employees and improving their financial stability.

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Dedication

I dedicate this to my four children, Juan, Kavon, Indya, and Kelly.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to honor God; without Him, this would not be possible. Thank you to my mentor, Dr. Deborah Nattress, for the excellent feedback, support, and guidance throughout this journey. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. David Strang, Dr. Maureen Marzano, Dr. Wooyoung Chung, Dr. Al Endres, and Dr. Yvonne Doll, for their valued feedback. For Dr. Dina Samora, who believed and encouraged me from the beginning, thank you. Thank you to my best friend and co-workers, Tamekio Daniel Watts and Linda Saunders. They have provided unceasing encouragement, support, and confidence throughout my doctoral journey. Finally, I would like to thank my husband, Charles and my mother, Shirley. Thank you for your abundance of support, love, confidence, and patience throughout my doctoral journey. You have been an integral part of my educational growth. Continuing my education and accomplishing this prestigious goal has been paramount in demonstrating that all things are possible with commitment, dedication, support, and God's word as my spiritual compass. I could not have completed this journey without family and spiritual guidance.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Leadership strategies are essential in terms of successful engagement of employees. Some leaders face ongoing challenges in engaging employees using their current leadership practices (Plaskoff, 2017). Employee engagement is a prerequisite of business success but is often confused with employee happiness (Anand, 2017). An engaged employee regards the future of the business' mission and is a valuable asset to the business (Anand, 2017). Leadership style also has a direct effect on employee engagement (Popli & Rizvi, 2017). The strategies business leaders use, therefore, are a prerequisite to successful employee engagement.

In this study, I explored strategies business leaders used to increase employee engagement in order to gain an understanding of potential techniques other leaders can employ to gain similar results. I used a qualitative case study design to understand what, how, and why about situations and strategies business leaders implemented to solve business problems.

Background of the Problem

Influential leaders have a profound impact on employee engagement. Leaders face ongoing challenges in terms of engaging employees using current leadership practices (Plaskoff, 2017). The lack of leader support and positive relationships in teams contribute to challenges and lower engagement levels (Sahu et al., 2018). Therefore, businesses require influential leaders who can positively influence employees by bolstering employee engagement to support and increase their performance (Nasomboon,

2014). Failure of leadership strategies to increase employee engagement may also have negative financial implications for businesses.

Lack of leadership strategies has an overwhelming effect on employee engagement and productivity in the workplace. Pasaribu (2015) explained that leadership behaviors and strategies significantly correlate with productivity in the workplace. Disengaged employees result in a $350 billion loss for U.S. corporations annually (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Deloitte (2017) said 51% of American workers in the restaurant industry are not engaged or committed to their work, resulting in high turnover, which reflects employees' feelings of motivation and competency relating to their role in the workplace, reflecting a decrease in overall engagement Leadership strategies correlate with leaders' preferred leadership style; therefore, leaders must become adaptable and establish methods to help develop viable strategies that foster employee engagement and maximize business growth and profitability.

Problem Statement

Lack of employee engagement may have a negative impact on businesses, causing low productivity and strained relationships between leaders and workers. Some business leaders continue to face ongoing challenges in engaging employees through current leadership practices (Plaskoff, 2017, p. 137). The general business problem is that lack of employee engagement may have a negative financial impact on businesses. The specific business problem is that some restaurant business leaders lack strategies to increase employee engagement.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies business leaders used to increase employee engagement. The targeted population consisted of leaders in four businesses in Virginia. I collected data from semistructured interviews and company websites used by business leaders who successfully implemented leadership strategies to increase employee engagement. Implications for positive social change include the potential to improve human and social conditions within communities. Promoting the worth and development of employees, leaders, and businesses leads to positive social change because businesses are interwoven into communities, thus positively affecting the wellbeing of society through improving quality of services provided to crucial stakeholders, including citizens.

Nature of the Study

There are three methods to conduct research: (a) qualitative, (b) quantitative, and (c) mixed methods (Saunders et al., 2016). Qualitative studies involve depth and insights regarding the phenomena under study, explaining what, how and why questions (Bleiker et al., 2019). Quantitative researchers test hypotheses or relationships between variables through statistical analysis (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). Researchers use mixed methods to incorporate quantitative and qualitative methods to provide information (Brown & Jacobsen, 2016). I chose to use the qualitative approach to provide a thick description of the phenomena under study. The qualitative method is suitable for this study because the purpose of the study is to explore strategies business leaders used to increase employee engagement. Researchers use the quantitative method to test a theory, hypotheses, or

relationships between variables (King et al., 2021). The quantitative method is not suitable for this study because the purpose of this study does not involve testing any theory, hypotheses, or relationship between variables. Mixed methods involve combining qualitative and quantitative methods in a single study (Vasquez-Colina et at., 2022). Mixed methods were not suitable for this study because I did not seek to test a theory, hypothesis, or relationship between variables but did seek to address what, how, and why situations.

Within this study, I considered four qualitative design options. The phenomenological design involves exploring personal meanings and lived experiences of participants to describe an occurrence. Ethnography involves researchers immersing themselves in the culture and environment of a group to characterize the culture. (The narrative design involves exploring personal sequential events through stories presented by participants. Researchers use the case study design to study how, what, and why research questions (Yin, 2018). The phenomenological design involves personal meanings of lived experiences of individuals and was not applicable for learning leadership strategies to increase employee engagement. Ethnography requires researchers to immerse themselves in the culture and environment of a group to learn everyday interactions in order to identify and analyze issues (Riera Claret et al., 2020). Since I did not research communities or environments to identify behaviors that present problems, ethnography was not appropriate for this study. A narrative approach was not appropriate because the proposed study did not require exploring and characterizing participants' personal stories but rather what leadership strategies were applied to increase employee

engagement. The case study design was suitable for this study because the purpose of this study was to address what strategies business leaders used to increase employee engagement.

Implementing the multiple case study design may provide additional opportunities to compare findings across cases and assure study validity. The multiple case study design involved collecting data through semistructured interview questions. Use of multiple cases should help develop a more comprehensive understanding of leadership strategies applied to increase employee engagement and decrease voluntary employee turnover.

Research Question

What leadership strategies do some business leaders use to increase employee engagement?

Interview Questions

1. What leadership strategies do you use to increase employee engagement?
2. Based on your experience, how do your leadership strategies help promote employee engagement?
3. What key challenges have you experienced when implementing leadership strategies to increase employee engagement?
4. How did you overcome key challenges you experienced when implementing leadership strategies to increase employee engagement?
5. How do you measure the effectiveness of your leadership strategies?

6. What else would you like to tell me about leadership strategies you have used to increase employee engagement?

Conceptual Framework

I used the situational leadership model as the conceptual framework for this study. Situational leadership, created by Hersey and Blanchard in 1969, is a style of leadership that involves subscribing to the situation of followers and the environment, meaning leaders must tailor their leadership style to the needs of employees (Hersey, 1984). The situational leadership model involves flexible and adaptable behaviors from leaders and consists of four dimensions: (a) directing, (b) supporting, (c) coaching, and (d) delegating. The leader applies one or some of these approaches, depending on the particular employee's need (Blanchard, 2019). Because situational leadership is an adaptive leadership style, the leader can react to support an individual or group's needs. Therefore, situational leadership as a conceptual framework should enable identifying and exploring strategies that assist selected business leaders in increasing employee engagement.

Operational Definition

Employee engagement: While there is no consensus regarding what employee engagement fully entails, individuals engage in their work roles in varying degrees, responding to ebbs and flows throughout the workday (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Employee engagement involves the need for autonomy, intrinsic reward, and influence; these factors give employees the motivation they need to become passionate about their

jobs and committed to business goals, resulting in high energy, emotion, and focused attention (Byrne et al., 2016; Osborne & Hammoud, 2017).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions in research are statements accepted as being true based on logic or reason (Turner, 2015). Limitations refer to potential weaknesses of the study that can influence interpretations of findings (Munthe-Kaas et at., 2019). Delimitations refer to the scope of the study or techniques used for deliberately narrowing the research focus (Preston & Claypool, 2021). Openly reporting assumptions, limitations, and delimitations improves quality of findings (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018).

Assumptions

Assumptions are facts considered to be true but are not actually verified (Turner, 2015). I assumed that participants were honest and truthful in their responses. Participants were guaranteed confidentiality. Also, I did not ask any socially embarrassing questions or questions regarding their trade secrets. I also assumed participants had knowledge necessary to answer questions during interviews. Participants selected were business leaders who successfully implemented strategies that increased employee engagement. I also assumed that participants took the necessary time to answer questions. I scheduled interviews when it was convenient for participants.

Limitations

Limitations refer to potential weaknesses of the study that are unavoidable and not under the control of the researcher (Matza et al., 2015). One such limitation is findings of the study may not be generalizable to the population. It may only be applied to a very

narrow population in a specific situation, such as during the time of COVID 19. However, I provided a thick, detailed description of the phenomenon under study that detailing descriptions and interpretations of the situations observed.

Delimitations

Delimitations refer to the bounds or scope of the study (Preston & Claypool, 2021). I interviewed four business leaders within the state of Virginia. The geographical location was restricted to the state of Virginia and participants were business leaders who used specific strategies to increase employee engagement.

Significance of the Study

The objective of this study was to explore strategies business leaders used to increase employee engagement while contributing to business practices in leadership and leading to positive social change.

Contribution to Business Practice

Employee engagement may influence contributions to business practices. Employee engagement has a profound effect on businesses, such as increased productivity and less absenteeism (Edelbroek & Blomme, 2019). Some leadership styles and strategies negatively affect employee engagement, and employee turnover within businesses regarding business performance (Moon & Park, 2019; Sahu et al., 2018). The findings of this study may be helpful for business managers in terms of planning and conceptualizing their leadership practices to increase their employees' engagement.

Implications for Social Change

Findings of this study may help to promote social change by empowering and enabling employees to have more positive authentic and genuine relationships in society. Employees may feel more satisfaction and enjoyment with their work due to improved employee engagement, catalyzing positive interactions for supporting individuals in local communities. Findings of the study may facilitate creating a positive working environment for employees. Leadership and management matching needs of their employees is good for employees because it may keep workers engaged and motivated and lead to stronger social connections between management and employees.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

To conduct the literature review, I examined academic resources involving different leadership strategies to foster employee engagement. Many factors influence employee engagement, such as the following transformational leadership components: (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration, as well as the following transactional leadership components: (a) rewards for performance, (b) constrained thinking, (c) institutionalizing, and (d) reinforcing and refining existing knowledge (Baškarada et al., 2017; Malik et al., 2017)). Situational leadership helps build morale because employees receive coaching and support necessary to perform their duties (Luo & Liu, 2014). Leaders who institute situational leadership realize the need for flexibility in terms of leadership styles (Avery, 2001; Lynch, 2015). Employee engagement is affected by variations in leadership styles and is an enormous task for every business to address involvement and commitment of

employees (Ismail et al., 2021). The annual cost of disengaged employees for U.S. corporations is $350 billion (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Situational leadership involves leadership styles: directive, coaching, supportive, and delegation according to the employee's range of developmental behavior (Northouse, 2019). Several leadership styles promote employee engagement, but no leadership style or approach alone suffices for all employees.

The purpose of this literature review was to identify how implementing situational leadership may promote employee engagement. I researched how situational leadership may positively impact employee engagement. While not all employees require the same leadership style, employing situational leadership strategies may be used to balance needs based on their ability and willingness to complete a task (Wright, 2017). I discussed how situational leadership promotes employee engagement when addressing diverse people and relevance of employee engagement to business success.

I presented a critical analysis of situational leadership and other supporting and contrasting theories within the literature review. 85% of peer-reviewed resources were published between 2018 and 2022. I used the following databases: ProQuest, Google Scholar, and ScholarWorks. Keywords searched to conduct the review were: *situational leadership*, *employee engagement*, *employee engagement strategies*, *leadership styles*, *leadership behavior*, *employee engagement in business*, *transformational leadership*, *transactional leadership*, *servant leadership*, *current literature on employee engagement*, *categories of employee engagement*, *benefits of employee engagement*, *leadership*, *historical views of leadership*, *contemporary views of leadership*, and *current leadership*

strategies to increase employee engagement. Keywords were used to help identify successful strategies used in leadership practices that promoted employee engagement.

Situational Leadership

The concept of situational leadership involves emphasizing leader needs to gauge their leadership style to fit the need of followers. Situational leadership is the most widely used leadership model in the world. Although highly used, it is under-researched. Situational leadership involves using a directive and supportive strategy that results in the leader evaluating the need of individuals, teams, and businesses (Blanchard, 2019). To understand the situational leadership style, I explained the concept and occurrences leaders face regarding individual readiness and possible leadership style responses.

The situational leadership approach consists of four leadership styles that match individuals' different developmental levels. Tasks and relationship behaviors related to the situational leadership approach are (a) high directive (task)/low supportive (relationship), (b) high directive (task)/high supportive (relationship), (c), high supportive (task)/low directive relationship), and (d) low supportive (task)/low directive (relationship) (Blanchard, 2019; Hersey, 1984; Northouse, 2019). R1, R2, R3, and R4 are the different readiness levels of learning for individuals or teams, while leaders determine high or low relationships according to individuals' readiness levels (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Situational Leadership Tasks and Relationship Behaviors

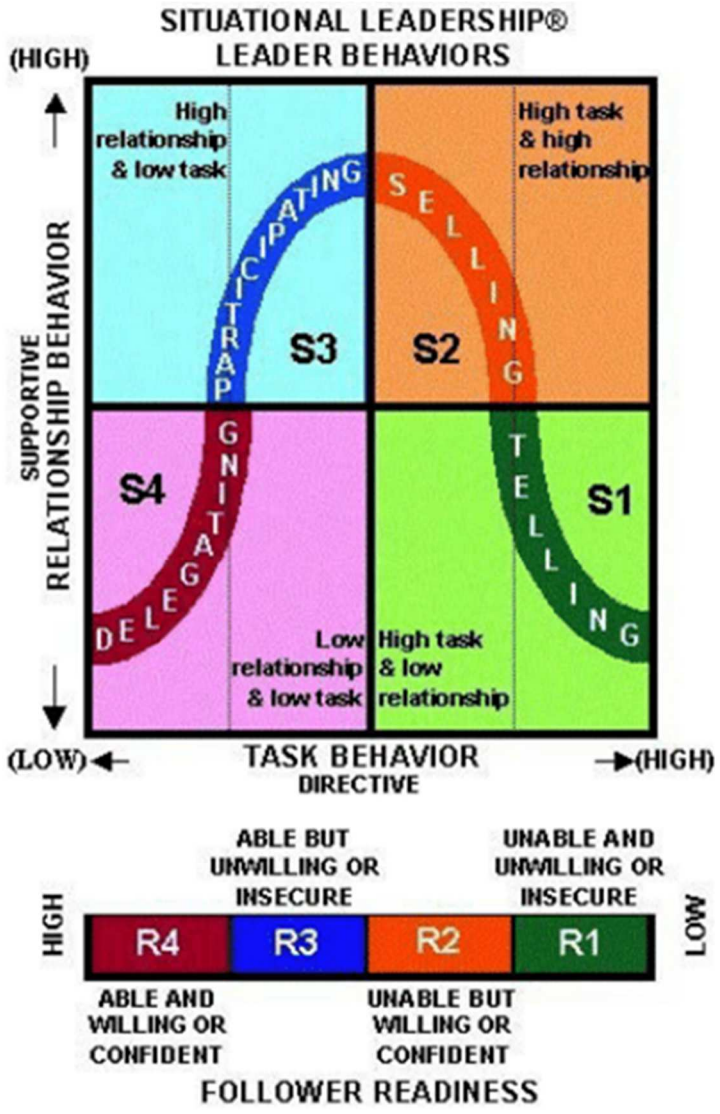


Figure 1 is a visual demonstration of relationship and task behaviors between leaders and followers. The 'R' stands for readiness levels of individuals to learn, and the 'S' stands for supportive behaviors exhibited by the leader. The first readiness level

correlates with R1/S1 and consists of a high directive and low supportive leadership style; this is the telling style (Northouse, 2019). Individuals within this category have no commitment to their work, knowledge, skill, or confidence, and rely on complete guidance or direction from the leader (Hersey, 1984). Individuals whose performance is lacking but are given a significant amount of support may be perceived as rewarded for underperformance (Hersey, 1984). Therefore, leaders must provide guidance that includes listening, clarifying, and facilitating, but not providing too much supportive behavior; this could lead to rewarding lack of performance (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969a). Leaders must ensure individuals in this category who have no knowledge or skills receive the necessary guidance that will lead them to the next readiness level.

The second readiness level correlates with high task and high relationship. The individual is motivated to accomplish the assignment but does not have the ability or lacks proficiency (Hersey, 1984). In this instance, the leader provides instruction or guidance by explaining or providing clarification, attempting to gain psychological buy-in from the individual (Hersey, 1984). Using different developmental levels will help bring leaders awareness about individual developmental levels, and whether they need directing, coaching, supporting, or delegating behaviors (Northouse, 2019). Implementing situational leadership means not using one leadership style but rather employing a method or strategy that best fits the situation (Zigarmi & Roberts, 2017). The high task/high relationship level brings awareness to the leader that the individual is prepared to learn but lacks proficiency and needs more instruction.

Rival Theories

Situational leadership is different from transformational, transactional, and servant leadership. The situational leadership style involves applying leadership skills according to the employee's motivation, ability, readiness, and willingness (Hersey, 1984). While transformational and situational leaders are similar, their approaches are different. Situational and transformational leaders are attentive to their followers' needs and inspire them to reach their fullest potential (Northouse, 2019). However, situational leaders allow their team members to develop and grow by instituting an environment that promotes self-awareness through personal reflexivity and accountability (Lynch, 2015). Situational leaders are people-oriented and focus on their relationships with followers, adapting their leadership style to meet the situation (Northouse, 2019). Situational leaders have the propensity to create a supportive, cohesive, and productive work environment, which assists in meeting business goals. Influential leaders are flexible and effectively communicate with their followers (Northouse, 2019). Situational leaders analyze the situation and dispel the one size fits all leadership approach by developing and empowering people they lead.

The situational leadership theory is not broad enough to represent a leadership behavior model; an individual's willingness to accept a leader's decision differs from an individual's ability to complete a task (Johansen, 1990; Smith, 1990). Johansen (1990) further stated that situational leadership is a theory that can assist in the further development of the nature of leadership but fails to function independently just because

the practice makes sense. While not everyone agrees on the concept of situational leadership, it is a theory that is widely used to gauge the readiness level of individuals.

Transformational Leadership

The type of leadership that involves stimulating and inspiring followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes by exceeding their expected performance is known as transformational leadership. Bass and Riggio (2006) said leaders who stimulate, inspire, and empower their followers move them to obtain objectives and goals that align with followers, leaders, and businesses. Transformational leadership has four dimensions: (a) individualized consideration, (b) idealized influence, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) inspirational motivation (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Individualized consideration involves leaders who meet individual needs by providing guidance. Leaders who show individualized consideration increase role clarity and develop trusting relationships with followers (Martinez-Corcoles et al., 2020). Leaders attend to their followers by listening to and supporting their needs. Leaders who exhibit individualized consideration tend to communicate and interact with their followers in a manner that furthers their development.

The concept of idealized influence involves leaders who are admired and trusted. Leaders emulate being role models for team members. Idealized influence involves role-modeling behavior and pertains to leaders' charisma or ability to influence and motivate followers by creating a collective vision (Koveshnikov, 2018). Leaders who influence and inspire employees may experience an increase in employee productivity.

Intellectual stimulation involves leaders who encourage their followers to be innovative and creative by approaching issues in new ways. Leaders who employ intellectual stimulation challenge assumptions, take risks, and solicit their followers' ideas (Avolio et al., 2009). The advantage of using intellectual stimulation is that it promotes critical thinking and problem-solving among followers, which leads to encouraging employee engagement.

Through inspirational motivation, transformational leaders compel followers to action and realize their purpose within businesses. Inspirational motivation relates to a leader's ability to inspire followers (Avolio et al., 2009). Leaders who employ the transformational leadership style can change followers' attitudes and beliefs and enhance employee commitment (Loo et al., 2017). Leaders who employ inspirational motivation have the propensity to assist employees in terms of meeting business needs and productivity goals because of enhancements in employee commitment.

Transactional Leadership

While transformational and transactional leadership have some similarities, there are significant differences. The transactional leadership theory is a reward style of leadership based on followers' commitment, dedication, and performance (Bass et al., 2003). Transactional leadership was described first by Max Weber in 1947 and later amended by Bernard Bass. Understanding the differences between the two leadership styles entails understanding relationships leaders have with their followers. Transformational leaders have greater integrity and interests in relating and collaborating with their followers than transactional leaders.

Transactional leadership is a rewards-based leadership style used by leaders who promote compliance of individuals through rewards and punishments. Transactional leaders view their followers as subordinates and limit relationships between leaders and followers (Trapero, 2010). Transactional leadership involves reciprocation, where leaders react based on followers' actions and reward behaviors using 'this for that' exchanges (Burns, 1995). Rewards and punishment are associated with the transactional leadership style and provisioned based on group or individual performance (Ghani et al., 2018). Some business leaders view transactional leadership as an ineffective leadership style because some transactional leaders do not promote a work environment that is conducive to enhancing positive behavior outside of bargaining techniques.

Transactional leaders focus more on processes, assigning tasks, and providing feedback, and less on transformational leadership attributes that involve charismatic, motivational, and inspirational behaviors. The transactional leadership style consists of three dynamics: contingent reward: active management by exception, and passive management by exception (Bass, 1997). Transactional leaders use a contingent reward system to incentivize employees to meet assigned tasks by rewarding them based on quality of work and meeting goals (Raziq et al., 2018). Therefore, attaining the reward is conditional and based on followers' ability to complete a task. The two dimensions of transactional leadership are active management by exception and passive management by exception (Bass, 1997). Passive management by exception involves more subdued, restrained, or avoidance behaviors (Raziq et al., 2018). The leader allows the follower to make mistakes and avoids interfering until they can no longer ignore the behavior (Raziq

et al., 2018). The difference between active and passive management by exception is the leader takes immediate actions for the former. A contingent reward is where the leader provides positive reinforcements for individuals who meet their goals. Transactional leadership is therefore contingent upon quid pro quo or this for that exchanges.

Leadership style has a significant effect on employee engagement, and understanding factors that impact and influence employee engagement has substantial implications on business outcomes. Leaders who implement processes and strategies that focus on enhancing employee engagement contribute significantly to job satisfaction and decreasing employee turnover by gaining business commitment (Popli & Rizvi, 2017). Furthermore, leaders in businesses who adopt strategies to promote employee engagement foster business commitment among employees and improved employee job performance, which increases overall business performance (Donkor & Zhou, 2020). Strategies that promote employee engagement may cause employees to become more incentivized to improve job performance, which could assist in meeting business goals and increase productivity.

Servant Leadership

Leaders who serve their team or others first and do not focus on their own objectives represent a style of leadership focused on valuing people. A leader's desire to focus on others' needs before considering their own is the foundation of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 2014). Greenleaf (2014) coined the servant leadership theory through a published essay derived from and inspired by Hermann Hesse's Journey to the East. Servant leadership begins with the desire to serve others, formalized from a

foundation of service first, compassion, and trust (Brown et al., 2020). Leaders who practice servant leadership are typically prevalent and more accepted in religious and nonprofit businesses due to the leadership philosophy (Carter & Baghurst, 2014). Leaders who value their people, show appreciation, and trust are more apt to help people develop and perform to their highest abilities.

While transformational leaders regard the business' mission first, servant leaders put the follower's needs at the forefront. The primary difference between transformational and servant leadership is the priority of the leaders (Stone et al., 2004). The attainment of business goals and objectives materializes when leaders focus on follower needs first (Stone et al., 2004). Leaders who practice servant leadership can encourage followers to participate in business decision-making by empowering them with the necessary information and developing and gaining employees' trust (Begzadeh & Nedaei, 2017). Although the concept of servant leadership is systematically undefined yet popular and effective, it is most comparable to transformational leadership as both styles share some of the same attributes, such as trust, influence, motivation, and respect (Russell & Stone, 2002). These attributes, reflected through servant leaders, are demonstrated through the leader's service, while transformational leaders demonstrate these characteristics to attain business goals.

There is a realizable difference between transformational, transactional, and servant leadership. While transformational and servant leadership have a primary difference in the leader's priority, transactional and servant leadership have more definitive differences regarding the leader-follower relationship (Brown et al., 2020).

Transactional leaders are deficient in supportive leader-follower relationships and more focused on influencing positive behavior and completing goals using rewards or punishment (Brown et al., 2020). Empirical studies reflected humble leadership, a characteristic of servant leadership, provided the highest impact on follower engagement (Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2017). Transactional leaders focus more on processes, transformational leaders are charismatic, while servant leaders create influence through the act of service without attracting attention on the leader's behalf.

Servant leadership is a holistic approach that focuses on others' needs and helps individuals achieve their goals by committing to their professional and personal goals. The altruistic behavior displayed in servant leadership has the propensity to enhance an individuals' job performance in business fostering public service motivation (Schwarz et al., 2016). To be an effective servant leader, the leader must show initiative, take ownership, and assume the risk of failure and success, while encompassing a service-oriented and action-driven demeanor (Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2017). A holistic approach to leadership produces idyllic outcomes in the process of the development of all participants.

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is essential to meeting business goals and increasing productivity. Employee engagement originated from research that analyzed employees' behavior to determine workplace motivation (Kahn, 1990). Individuals engage in their work roles in varying degrees, dependent upon their psychological presence during role performance, responding to ebbs and flows throughout the workday (Kahn, 1990).

Employees and businesses benefit from engaged employees (Alcala, 2017). Employee engagement involves the need for autonomy, intrinsic reward, and influence, suggesting these factors give employees the motivation they need to become passionate about their jobs and commitment to the business' goals resulting in high energy, emotion, and focused attention (Byrne et al., 2016; Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). While employee commitment focuses on an employee's satisfaction, employee engagement involves employees making the extra effort to attain business goals (Mitonga-Monga, 2019). Employees' need to feel valued, be treated equally, and possess a working relationship with their leaders is essential in promoting employee engagement (Morton et al., 2019). Guterman et al. (2017) support employees' need to have a working relationship with their employers to shape employee engagement. Employees who are engaged are more passionate about their work and more committed to their employers, possibly decreasing employee turnover.

The lack of employee engagement compounds on existing issues that public service businesses already encounter, such as productivity challenges and meeting business goals. Scholars and practitioners have searched for meaningful ways to improve performance; one approach involves focusing on how to increase the motivation of public service employees (Hur, 2018). Kahn's theory of employee engagement builds on Herzberg's Two Factory theory – hygiene factors and growth factors (Hur, 2018). Individual differences and situational factors can influence engagement or disengagement relative to the psychological importance of work to individuals' identities or self-esteem (Kahn, 1990). Most public service businesses have high-pressure levels to improve

performance coupled with a lack of employee engagement, leading to performance concerns, and making it challenging to attract and retain qualified people (Lavigna, 2018). Employees' efforts and level of commitment impact a business' productivity and level of success; therefore, lower engagement levels may negatively impact a business' success. Engaged employees are happier and more committed to business goals; thus, businesses are more prone to meeting their goals and retaining qualified people.

Leaders need strategies that promote employee engagement. Leaders who lead according to the need of the follower and the business are better able to use strategies that promote employee engagement (Raza & Sikandar, 2018). Therefore, implementing a leadership style that accommodates or serves followers and business' needs may assist in high work performance (Neha & Narwal, 2017). Situational leadership is one such leadership style that promotes the need of the follower by adjusting the leadership style to suit the needs of the individual or team.

Current Literature on Employee Engagement

There is a preponderating amount of information regarding employee engagement and its effect on performance management. Many researchers of the current literature suggested that employee engagement has an overwhelming impact on competitive advantage, provides solutions for business issues, and increases workplace performance (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014; Shuck et al., 2011). Although employee engagement is a current topic within academia and businesses, there is no unanimous definition, leaving scholars and practitioners defining the term differently (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014). Bedarkar and Pandita conducted a study that focused mainly on three critical drivers of

employee engagement: (a) leadership, (b) work-life balance, and (c) communication; leadership being the most influential driver of employee engagement. Leadership strategies are a precursor to engagement; leaders and businesses must cultivate a workplace environment that supports employees and help them stay motivated (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014; Wright, 2017). Engaged employees tend to demonstrate a higher work performance; they tend to outperform their less immersed or committed counterparts, positively impacting productivity, and can decrease employee turnover (Raza & Nadeem, 2018). Although there are three critical drivers of employee engagement, leadership is the most influential and strategies leaders use are the prelude to engaged employees.

There is no one element of employee engagement. McBain (2007) argued that while employee engagement is the desirable goal, it should not be an end, recognizing and keeping in mind the business' purpose. McBain pointed out that employee engagement often assists in creating alignment with the business' goals. Some businesses view employee engagement and commitment similarly, while others view the two as separate issues (McBain, 2007). This idea aligns with the multiple interpretations of employee engagement due to the lack of a unanimous definition. Employee engagement has become a consequential topic over the past 10 years (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014). Twelve studies conducted for 4 years indicated more than 26 key drivers to employee engagement (The Conference Board, 2006). Although there are ways to monitor and measure employee engagement, such as surveys - the most common way businesses obtain feedback from employees, business issues remain regarding the progression of individual's work engagement; there may be alternative ways to promote engagement.

Because there is no consensus on what employee engagement fully entails, it leaves to question the validity and reliability of the current measurement instruments. Further study and inquiry to establish an agreement of employee engagement may help develop a more precise path for leaders to provide adequate tools, training, and resources needed to help promote individual's growth and guide them to a course of genuine involvement and contribution.

Categories of Employee Engagement

Employee engagement or the lack thereof can have lasting effects within the culture of a business. Engagement consists of three categories (a) engaged, (b) not engaged, and (c) actively disengaged (Hultman, 2020; Shuck et al., 2011). Individuals who lack engagement may become frustrated and opt to leave the company, resulting in negative reverberations (Hultman, 2020). The consequences of disengaged individuals can cause undesirable effects, such as productivity losses, decreased performance, and can negatively impact society (Nienaber & Martins, 2020). Individuals that are not engaged are generally satisfied but lack an emotional and cognitive connection to the workplace (Harter, 2018; Shuck et al., 2011). Leaders must build a culture within their business that promote an environment of engagement.

Actively disengaged employees act out their unhappiness with the workplace, failing to reach self-actualization. Actively disengaged workers consist of individuals who are dissatisfied and act on their dissatisfaction with the workplace (Hultman, 2020). Shuck et al. conducted a qualitative case study that integrated Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Kahn's employee engagement as the conceptual frameworks. Shuck et al.

concluded from their research that Maslow's hierarchy of needs addressed an individual's experience or lack thereof, which is the most relevant engagement factor. Alternatively, Helbling (2018) argued that while Maslow's hierarchy reflects individuals are fundamentally structured to provide their basic needs and build upon their need level, some factors were assumed to be linear without deviation. Helbling conveyed that individuals will often tolerate some degree of suffering before accomplishing the goal of self-actualization, the highest level of psychological development in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow's hierarchy is relevant to Kahn's employee engagement because it allows leaders to understand employee values and establish the most suitable environment that positively shapes employee's behaviors (Helbling, 2018). Maslow's hierarchy of needs is relevant to Kahn's employee engagement because individuals may be able to be motivated to realize their own personal growth and development.

Motivation and engagement complement each other because motivated employees tend to be more engaged. Helbling (2018) stated more than 70% of employees become disengaged every day. Engaged employees are happier in their jobs and form and maintain good relationships with their leaders and co-workers, reflecting their loyalty and increased productivity levels (Budriene & Diskiene, 2020). A leader's ability to motivate individuals and increase employee engagement is essential to meeting business goals and increased productivity.

Benefits of Employee Engagement

Employee engagement impacts the end goal of increased productivity and can significantly impact the business' culture and customer satisfaction. Employee

engagement touches almost every facet of human resource management (Markos & Sridevi, 2010). Therefore, instituting strategies, such as orientation, for managers and employees establishes a clear expectation and can assist individuals by informing new members of the tools to become productive team members (Johnson et al., 2018). Orientation also sets a standard and expectation of managers/leaders to promote an business culture that supports and optimizes employee engagement (Johnson et al., 2018; Othman et al., 2017). Due to the significance and impact of employee engagement in the workplace, leadership should have a profound concern in keeping employees engaged (Scott, 2010). Employee engagement has a profound impact on a business' culture and can impact customer satisfaction, because of this, leaders should establish strategies that improve employee engagement.

Employee's dedication may create an emotional attachment with the business, effectuating a deeper commitment and loyalty with the agency, depending on the employees' level of engagement. Engagement has gained greater importance since employee performance drivers have been identified, making employee engagement increasingly popular among scholars and practitioners (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014; Rana, 2015). The benefits of employee engagement extend beyond increased productivity and decreased turnover but incorporate the retention of the most qualified individuals motivated to do their best work and desire to stay with the company (Raza & Nadeem, 2018). Over time, engaged individuals also tend to become more creative, productive, and dedicated (Choudhury et al., 2021). Four high involvement work practices (HIWP) are associated with increased employee engagement: (a) power – empowering employees

to make informed decisions and participate in decision making, (b) reward – rewarding employees for jobs well-done, (c) information – shared information with employees that keeps staff informed, and (d) knowledge – providing employees with the necessary training to successfully perform their duties (Rana, 2015). The four HIWP practices help influence employee engagement, promoting job satisfaction and business commitment (Rana, 2015). It is necessary to empower individuals with the resources they need to promote job satisfaction, business commitment, and to keep the most qualified individuals to stay with the company.

The relation between the four HIWP's and critical drivers of employee engagement helps debunk any misconceptions regarding employee engagement on business success and employee well-being. Raza and Nadeem (2018) also identified three key drivers of employee engagement synonymous to HIWP: (a) performance rewards, (b) communication, and (c) decision making. Employee engagement can profoundly affect an employee's well-being (Wang et al., 2017). Individuals' well-being can increase by the influx of proactive behaviors that align with their needs and preferences (Wang et al., 2017). Therefore, employee engagement can provoke positive emotions, such as happiness, energy, and fulfillment (Wang et al., 2017). Happiness, then, not only occurs in the workplace but can cascade into an individual's home life, which becomes beneficial to families (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014). Therefore, employee engagement is associated with positive emotions not only within the workplace but within the community.

Leadership

Leaders should have the ability to influence groups and/or individuals to meet business goals. The term *leader* has been around since biblical times, but the way we term *leadership* has evolved (Stogdill, 1975). Leadership is an elusive, puzzling, and widely discussed subject (Cronin, 1995); it is the most observed and the least understood phenomena on earth (Burns, 1995). The earliest research regarding leadership consisted of two significant schools of thought, situational and personalistic, which have several subgroups (Stogdill, 1975). The situational school regarded an individual's needs, while personalistic emphasized the leader's importance as an individual in which the group is primarily subservient (Stogdill, 1975). Within the first two decades of the twentieth century, theorists of the situational school of thought agreed that leadership grew out of group processes and problems and were instrumental in group goal attainment (Stogdill, 1975). Personalists believed a leader played an active role in directing the group's activities, endowed with abilities and characteristics acknowledged and regarded by group members (Stogdill, 1975). Situational and personalistic schools of thought formed together emphasize the importance of leaders and leadership within businesses.

Leadership styles can vary from charismatic to servant traits and emerge from leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi, or Barack Obama. There are many definitions for leadership, but the most pondered question is whether leadership is learned or inherent (Cronin, 1995). Still, leadership can embody narcissistic characteristics where leaders manipulate, mislead, and oppress others, such as Hitler, Al Capone, or Machiavelli (Cronin, 1995; Machiavelli, 1995). Individuals, teams, and businesses seek

compelling, creative leaders who work for the people. Gaining insight into the historical views of leadership may bring clarity and understanding of how leadership has evolved.

Historical Views of Leadership

Understanding the multiple ways leadership has historically prevailed or languished under leaders' provision may help future leaders move forward. Some leaders who precede us, such as Mahatma Gandhi and Niccolo Machiavelli, have some similarities and differences in the way they led. Gandhi had the ability and influence to attract followers with his servant-style method of leadership. His high levels of altruism, passion for peace, sincerity, and betterment of others' lives played a significant role in many such people's followership. However, he was not a *chosen leader* [emphasis added] nor elected to leadership (Gandhi, 1995). While Machiavelli was an appointed leader and Gandhi was not, understanding the history of leadership and the influence leaders have over followers assist future leaders in moving forward.

It is imperative to understand leadership even through the awareness and influence of an individual such as Machiavelli. Machiavelli was known as a person who believed in less than ethical and immoral approaches to gain power (Simone, 2015). While leaders in Machiavelli's era dismissed him, despite his contribution to the political arena, manuals of Machiavelli's style of leadership and deceptive methods of rule are studied diligently by those who are in power and lead by deception in the 21st century (Galie & Bopst, 2006). The historical views of leadership provide insight into an era that preceded our time; however, the critical synthesis of contemporary leadership can reveal

the characteristics needed to develop and inspire individuals to accomplish a business' goals through personal influence.

Contemporary Views of Leadership

The contemporary views of leadership discussed will entail transformational, transactional, servant, and situational leadership. Burns (1995) noted, "The crisis of leadership today is the mediocrity or irresponsibility of so many of the men and women in power, but leadership rarely rises to the full need for it" (p. 9). Previous studies reflect the positive influence of multiple leadership styles to meet the needs and changing requirements of businesses and individual employees (Rosinski, 2017). The following analysis will detail each leadership style and explain how the flexibility and move from one leadership style to another to meet individuals' needs may better help meet business goals.

Transformational Leadership. Transformational leadership's characteristics and aspects illustrate and confirm the influence and positive effect of adopting or embracing transformational leadership as a style of leadership to possess. Transformational leadership occurs when "one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (Burns, 1995, p. 101). Transformational leadership within the context of customer service entities will be analyzed, referencing how transformational leadership can improve internal and external service quality within a customer service environment. The context also addresses how transformational leadership can positively influence the culture of a business. An evaluation and synthesis of transformational leadership will follow,

supporting specific context and presenting a model representing four transformational leadership components critical to a business' success consistent with a customer service environment.

Transformational leaders inspire trust in their team members and each component of transformational leadership assist leaders in helping individuals meet and exceed individual and business performance. It has become essential to implement an adroit leadership style in which followers are provided with a vision, inspired to grow, and motivated to exceed even their expectation of success (Couto, 1995). While James M. Burns was the father of transforming leaders, Bass (1985) expanded on Burns' work and changed transforming leaders to transformational leaders (Couto, 1995). As shown in Figure 2, there are four transformational leadership constituents: (a) individualized consideration, (b) intellectual stimulation, (c) inspirational motivation, and (d) idealized influence (Avolio et al., 1991). The constituents of transformational leadership were added by Bass, Avolio, Waldman, and Yammarino. Bass contributed individualized consideration and inspirational motivation, while Avolio et al. contributed intellectual stimulation and idealized influence. Each component of transformational leadership assists leaders in influencing and motivating followers to commit to the vision of the business.

Transformational leadership can have a positive effect on followers within workgroups by encouraging or influencing leadership abilities. Followers can show leadership signs using social influence to promote change when put in leadership positions within workgroups (Schaubroeck et al., 2016). The effects of leadership

positions bestowed upon followers within workgroups help solidify how transformational leadership allows groups of people to move from one stage of development to a higher one to address and fulfill a more elevated human need (Couto, 1995). The study of transformational leadership and its effect on followers with leadership behaviors showed better conformity to adhering to customer service performance guidelines (Schaubroeck et al., 2016). In this instance, transformational leadership correlates with Maslow's hierarchy of needs because it has a direct effect on increasing employee motivation the same way Maslow's hierarchy relates to innate human needs. Transformational leadership consists of many characteristics that influence external customer relations as well as internal customer relations. The use of a bottom-up approach, also known as a democratic leadership style, is beneficial within transformational leadership because it conveys a concern for the followers and their feelings (Devi & Subiyantoro, 2021). The democratic process communicates a sense of respect and appreciation for the follower's inputs. The democratic approach communicates to the follower that their knowledge is wanted and essential and can assist in the success of employees working together to achieve a common goal (Dyczkowska & Dyczkowska, 2018). External customer relations can be affected positively because transformational leadership among followers promotes positive behavioral change in staff that ultimately encourages staff to exhibit better performance service (Schaubroeck et al., 2016). Smith and Hogg (2016) stated followers are more inclined to understand and accept their coworker's perspectives because they are in the same social group, promoting behavior change in others (Smith and Hogg,

2016). The positive behavioral change among staff affects the relationship between staff and clients.

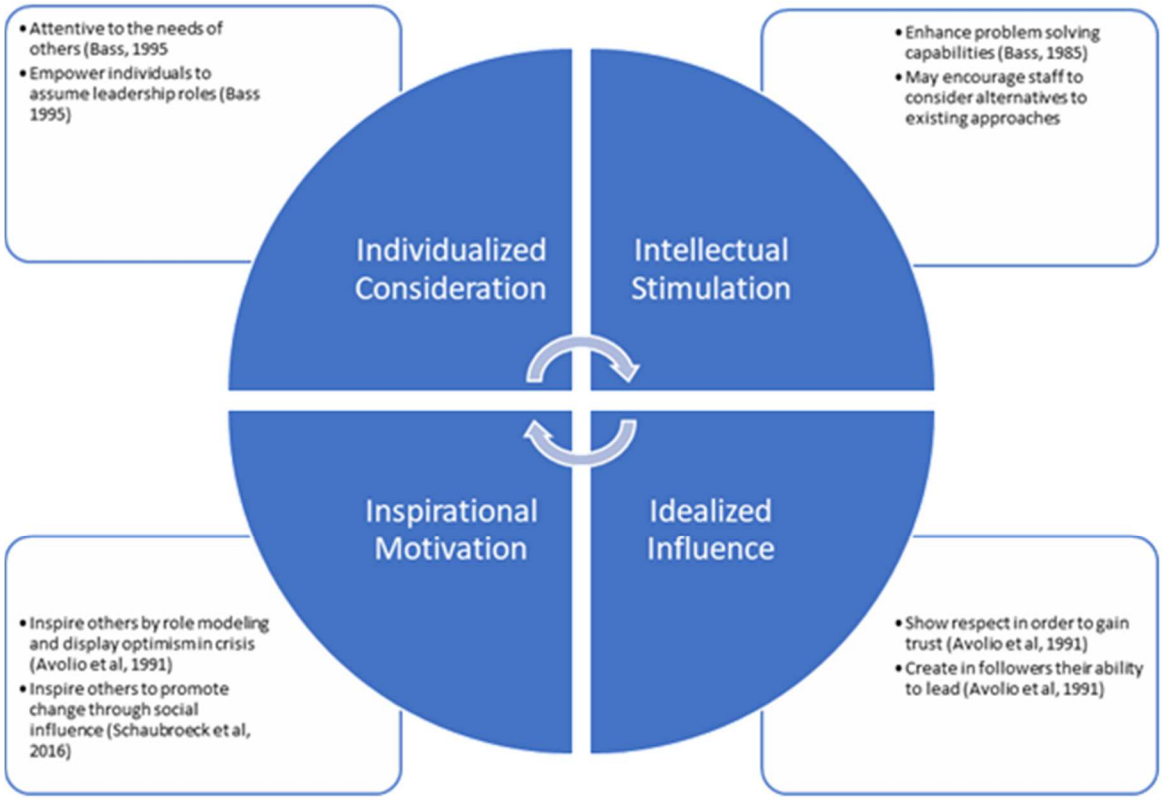
While there is no one definition or style for leadership, there are specific common characteristics found in multiple leaders. Transformational leadership, characterized as superior leadership performance, involves expanding and enhancing followers' interests, provoking awareness, and inspiring them to look beyond their interest to promote the business' good (Seltzer, 1990). Motivation and influence are two qualities of an effective leader. Without the traits of motivation and influence, the ability to lead diminishes (Gardner, 1995). President Barack Obama, a contemporary leader, used his transformational leadership style and charisma to influence a nation to elect him as the first African American President of the United States (McGuire et al., 2016). President Nelson Mandela, a historical leader, also the first black president of South Africa, influenced others to disregard their self-interest to better the nation. Influence is a characteristic of transformational leadership best described by Avolio et al. (1991). Avolio et al. (1991) suggested idealized influence present itself by a show of respect for others. Followers can build trust and confidence in leaders who offer behaviors, values, and attitudes that effectuate favorable results (Avolio et al., 1991). Leaders who produce precise results and overcome missions that appear unattainable not only present to followers that they can achieve anticipated results but build trust in their abilities to attain future accomplishments (Avolio et al., 1991). This attainment signifies a transformational leader (Avolio et al., 1991). Idealized influence is significant because it

involves leaders who conduct themselves in a manner that results in them being examples for others to pattern after.

Figure 2 depicts an example of a current view of leadership. The model is reflective of four components of transformational leadership and what it looks like in the customer service field. Empowering individuals to take on leadership roles within workgroups will foster growth from one developmental level to a higher level, encouraging leadership in lower-level staff (Couto, 1995). Individualized consideration not only foster's growth but build's future leaders (Avolio et al., 1991). Leaders within the realm of customer service will display individualized consideration to empower individuals to assume leadership roles, allowing staff who aspire to lead to take on leadership roles within workgroups.

Figure 2

Transformational Leadership Model



Note. Adapted from "The Effect of the Dimensions of Transformational Leadership on the Teachers' Performance in the Yemeni Public Schools," by M. Alzoraiki, O. Rahman, & M. A. Mutalib, 2018, *European Scientific Journal, 14*(25), p. 325. (https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2018.v14n25p322).

Inspirational motivation found in transformational leaders inspires a sense of purpose in team members to better motivate them to meet business goals. Leaders who use inspirational motivation will encourage and inspire others by remaining optimistic in a time of crisis (Avolio et al., 1991). This type of behavior may strengthen the leader's

appeal, encourage self-confidence within the staff, and provide staff with a feeling the leader can overcome obstacles (Avolio et al., 1991). Leaders should also encourage staff to promote change by exercising positive social influence (Schaubroeck et al., 2016). Social influence is another's actions or persuasions that positively or negatively influence or inspire (Hughes et al., 1995). While this tactic promotes the sharing of leadership amongst staff, it may also move peers to positively influence each other (Schaubroeck et al., 2016). Inspirational motivation provokes creativity and is significant to social influence because inspirational motivation has the propensity to change another's behaviors inadvertently just as social influence has the same tendency.

Intellectual stimulation within the customer service realm may influence staff to find alternative ways for solutions. Intellectual stimulation may also be a way to involve staff in preventative and alternative measures of handling internal and external conflict (Avolio et al., 2016). Intellectual stimulation may provide supporting evidence to solve problems internally and externally based on new ideas through reasoning (Avolio et al., 2016). Leaders that implement intellectual stimulation into their leadership style encourages innovation. Innovation is relevant because it can assist in adding value to businesses.

Leaders who implement idealized influence in their leadership style have the tendency to be trusted and respected. Idealized influence may inspire leaders to act so that followers look to them as role models and aspire to follow in the leader's footsteps (Avolio et al., 2016). It involves charisma, which is the aspect of being admired and respected as a leader (Brown et al., 2020). Leaders who desire to gain trust and respect

must first initiate respect and build follower's confidence (Avolio et al., 2016). While optimism is a construct of transformational leadership, a recent study reflects optimism partially impacts transformational leader behavior on innovative capability within a business (Azizah et al., 2020). Idealized influence is relevant because individuals may identify with this type of leader and want to pattern themselves after them.

While motivation and influence are only two transformational leadership characteristics, they are not the only components. Leaders and followers can build the business' strength by utilizing the four components of Transformational leadership (Avolio et al., 2016). Implementing transformational leadership into the business' current transactional leadership style may broaden the set of leadership skills and potential leaders within an agency (Avolio et al., 2016). Transformational leaders have skills that inspire positive change and create a trust culture within the business (Schein, 1995). Leadership and culture are intertwined in that if a business' culture is dysfunctional, the leader must rectify the situation (Schein, 1995). Transformational leadership comprises leaders who possess leadership characteristics in addition to motivation and influence.

Transactional Leadership. Jacobsen and Salomonsen (2021) conducted a study that assessed the strength of combining multiple leadership styles in businesses and determined leaders can improve internal communication within their businesses through transactional and transformational leadership combined. Another study reflected transactional leadership has a significant impact on employee commitment but reflected no increased employee commitment with transformational leadership (Puni et al., 2021).

Max Weber was the first to introduce transactional leadership (Schneider & Schroder, 2012). Transactional leaders apply contingent rewards through verbal and internal communications and sanctions to help employees meet business goals; some evaluate the transactional leadership style as a powerful and positive form of leadership (Jacobsen & Salomonsen, 2021; Schneider & Schroder, 2012). While contingent rewards are used in the transactional leadership style, it provides reinforcement for positive work performance.

Leaders who use transactional leadership practices institute rewards and punishments to encourage compliance in followers. The transactional leadership style purports an exchange of something the follower wants in exchange for something the leader wants (Puni et al., 2021). The 'this for that' exchange is the significant difference between transformational and transactional leadership, the transaction between what leaders and followers offer one another (Puni et al., 2021). Transactional leadership has three facets or dimensions, contingent reward, management by exception active, and exception passive (Saeed & Mughal, 2019). Contingent rewards allow leaders to set business goals and compensations based on employee's behaviors, results, or efforts (Nielsen et al., 2019). Upon the employee's completion of tasks that contribute to the business' objectives, leaders reward the followers with benefits and compensations (Saeed & Mughal, 2019). Contingent rewards fall under transactional leadership when the incentives are tangible or material, such as bonuses, but can be reasoned as a transformational leadership trait when the motivation is psychological, such as praise (Breevaart et al., 2014). The subsequent two roles, management by exception active and

passive, differ in that active management plays a vital role in leadership and is involved before any problems arise (Saeed & Mughal, 2019). Contingent rewards may increase intrinsic motivation due to meeting the employee's basic needs for competence (Jacobsen & Andersen, 2017). The use of transactional leadership could be seen as beneficial to the employees because it provides a clear communication of the reward and punishment system. Individuals are aware of repercussions to their actions.

Although some leaders who use the transactional leadership style use contingent rewards to achieve the desired results from followers, transactional leaders are also considered management by exception – passive. In contrast, contingent rewards may have a detrimental effect on motivational outcomes because material rewards can control the employee's behavior (Nielsen et al., 2019). A passive leader does not participate in an active role with management by exception - passive (Saeed & Mughal, 2019). Instead, management by exception passive involves leadership that awaits the problem to occur and then addresses mistakes that have been made. Figure 3 shows the multiple traits and characteristics of transactional leaders.

Figure 3

Transactional Leadership Characteristics

Note. Adapted from "Transactional Leadership Meaning, Importance & Example" by MBA Skool, 2021, (https://www.mbaskool.com/business-concepts/human-resources-hr-terms/17820-transactional-leadership.html).

The culture of business is relevant to leadership in that it effects how leaders interact with followers and each other. A business' culture, which consists of values, beliefs, ideas, norms, and attitudes, plays a significant role in a leader's success, the followers, and the business; culture is a process or facet that binds the employees and the business (Saeed & Mughal, 2019; Savovic, 2017). Transactional leaders that had only an undergraduate degree focused more on the importance of culture within a business (Saeed & Mughal, 2019). Still, as education levels increased, the focus was less critical

regarding a business' culture (Saeed & Mughal, 2019). The research also reflected the importance of transactional leadership and its increased focus on performance and experience as the length of service increased, indicating that public service employees' performance is more focused than in the private sector (Saeed & Mughal, 2019). Transactional leadership is just as relevant to the culture of a business than transformational leadership values. Figure 4 reflects the differences between transactional and transformational leadership and how it works within the culture of a business.

Figure 4

Transactional versus Transformational Leadership

	Transactional Leadership	Transformational Leadership
How it works	Works within a system.	Works to change a system.
	Starts solving by fitting experiences to a known pattern.	Starts solving by finding experiences that show the old pattern doesn't fit.
	Asks "where's the step-by-step?"	Asks "what do we need to change?"
What it does	Minimizes variation of the organization.	Maximizes capability of the team.
	Expects everyone meet a standard.	Inspires many people to give their best.
	Can be duplicated and sustained.	Requires minimal structure.
	Best at delivering defined results.	Best at delivering innovation.

Note. Adapted from "Engineering leadership: Build it up, pass it on!" by Hellis, 2014. (https://builditupassiton.wordpress.com/2014/05/12/transactional-and-transformational-leadership-work-hand-in-hand/).

Because transactional leaders have a degree of transparency due to a more elevated measure of clarity, team members know what is expected of them and can more easily reach defined goals. Transactional leaders incentivize followers to fulfill their expectations and promote follower job performance, but the leader does not individualize their needs or focus on their personal development (Breevaart et al., 2014; Northouse, 2019). Instead, transactional leaders ensure expectations are met by stimulating the follower's work engagement (Breevaart et al., 2014). Although, Breevaart explained that most leaders have transactional and transformational leadership tendencies. Breevaart's explanation demonstrates that it can be best to conform the leader's style to the need of the individual or team, using an adaptive leadership style such as situational leadership.

Situational Leadership. Situational leadership is a leadership style that acknowledges the need of the team or an individual. Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership theory (SLT), first introduced as the life cycle of leadership and often cited in academically oriented textbooks, is one of the most widely known leadership theories in management training programs. Within SLT, inexperienced followers may demand a need for low support and high directive behaviors; as followers become more competent, supportive behaviors would increase, and directive behaviors would decrease (Thompson & Glaso, 2018). SLT predictions are more likely to hold when leader rating and follower self-rating are congruent rather than using leader rating alone (Thompson & Glaso, 2015). When defining leadership, it is typically the process of influencing the activities of an individual or a group in the effort to accomplish a goal (Hersey et al., 1979). Northouse (2019) defined leadership as the behaviors of a person who attempts to

influence others and is engaged in leadership. Leaders who use the situational leadership style not only influence the activities of individuals, but they purport the need of individuals and adjust their style to meet the need which fosters or increases employee engagement and assists individuals in better meeting business goals.

The leadership approach has a significant impact on the four readiness levels. A Raza and Sikandar (2018) explored the impact of teacher's leadership styles on the performance of students regarding Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership model and said Teachers' leadership styles impact students' readiness levels. There was a notable difference in the achievement scores relating to telling and selling techniques against delegating and participating, revealing a strong correlation and impact on student's performance, especially those with low readiness levels (Raza & Sikandar, 2018). If employees cannot connect with the leadership style, the potential to increase employee engagement is less likely to occur due to the leadership style not correlating with the readiness level of the individual or group.

Situational leadership purports to the readiness level of the individual. While the situational leadership style is one of the more widely recognized approaches to leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969), Thompson & Glaso (2018) proposed it remains among the least-researched views of managerial effectiveness. Thompson and Glaso (2018) also stated Hersey and Blanchard had made very few attempts to document SLT's validity. Some contentions of the effectiveness of SLT stem from the difficulty in assessing the readiness levels of followers and the reservation that age, years of experience, and education level are accurate predictors of follower's readiness level (Thompson & Glaso,

2015). While the situational leadership style purports to the readiness level of the individual or group, there are predictors that effect the readiness level of individuals which can affect the ability of a person to complete specific tasks.

In my experience, SLT will enable leaders to become more aware of followers' needs and allow provisions to develop the skills and confidence of followers. While there has been some discrepancy with SLT, the leadership style allows leaders to treat different followers differently (Thompson & Glaso, 2018). For leaders to be influential, they must determine where the followers are on the developmental scale and adapt their leadership styles to parallel with the follower's developmental levels (Northouse, 2019). Influential leaders would entail knowing when to tell/direct, sell/coach, participate/support, or delegate (Northouse, 2019; Raza & Sikandar, 2018; Wright, 2017). Hersey and Blanchard developed the situational leadership model based on a leader's ability to change the behavior of their followers (Raza & Sikandar, 2018). The application of situational leadership in the business would materialize based on the flexibility and aspects of leadership derived from the developmental levels of the staff members.

Current Leadership Strategies to Increase Employee Engagement

Employee engagement involves the enthusiasm and fulfilment of employees in their work and within their place of employment. Employee engagement refers to an individual's satisfaction, enthusiasm, and involvement with their work (Harter et al., 2002). Leadership strategies to increase employee engagement include gaining employee trust by implementing self-awareness, transparency, and incorporating honesty, fairness, and accountability (Jiang & Luo, 2018). Leaders who implement situational leadership

allow these factors to occur because leaders can gauge employees and adjust their leadership style to fit the individual or group (Lang, 2016). Leaders who know and understand their natural leadership style can assess whether it is the best fit for an individual or need to change their style of leadership (Lang, 2016). Current leadership strategies to increase employee engagement includes leaders gaining the trust of their employees and instituting transparency and fairness.

Leadership strategies have a profound effect on employee engagement and the work environment. While there are limited studies that examine the effects of leadership behavior on employee's work engagement, Breevaart et al. (2014) stated that leaders' daily behavior influences engagement and the work environment. Leader humility is one such behavior that positively affects employees' creative performance, implementing humility can stimulate employee engagement with the business (Li et al., 2021). Leader humility fosters a supportive, humble climate within teams and the business (Yuan et al., 2018). Leaders who know their strengths and weaknesses and can communicate clearly to their employees foster increased engagement among their staff (Jiang & Luo, 2018). Leadership abilities are an instrumental aspect of employee engagement that can affect employee performance and have a profound impact on the bottom line.

Innovation drives employee engagement because employee engagement depicts an individuals' willingness to learn and participate in company goals. Promoting innovative thought and actions increases employee engagement and levels of innovation (Leong & Anderson, 2012). It is imperative to consider the impact of business and managerial cultures on employee engagement levels when seeking to increase levels of

innovation (Leong & Anderson, 2012). Developing a holistic approach to innovative strategies also has the propensity to increase employee engagement (Leong & Anderson, 2012). Therefore, instituting an environment that increases employee engagement has the propensity to increase innovative thinking among employees.

Today's workforce is increasingly diverse. Leaders can increase employee engagement and trust by implementing diversity and inclusion practices (Downey et al., 2015). Businesses must implement policies and procedures that include individuals from all backgrounds, resulting in positive outcomes for businesses (Downey et al., 2015). When businesses provide resources and support their employees, the employees reciprocate by being engaged with the business (Downey et al., 2015); reciprocity is the best-known exchange rule, and engagement can act as a means of repaying a business in exchange for the support received (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Therefore, leaders who respect diversity in the workplace has a better opportunity to have positive outcomes in the workplace.

Employee engagement references how employees feel about the culture of their business. According to Brown (2014), there are several crucial leadership strategies that can improve employee engagement and increase the cohesiveness of a team. Cultivating a high level of trust is a pertinent factor in improving employee engagement (Brown, 2014). Leaders can accomplish a high level of trust by creating an atmosphere of teamwork and performance and proactively anticipating the need of the team members (Brown, 2014). Implementing strong core values allow employees to make decisions and take appropriate actions in challenging times (Brown, 2014). Other factors that improve

and increase employee engagement require leaders to create a culture that encourages employees to assume risks and learn from their mistakes, engage in active listening to become better communicators, and build on employee's strengths to mitigate their weaknesses (Brown, 2014). Leaders must also be able to imagine the future and articulate the business' vision while incorporating how the employee's work is part of the attainment of the vision (Brown, 2014). Leadership strategies have a profound impact on the culture of a business, increasing engagement and productivity.

Building trust is essential to employee engagement. Jiang and Luo (2018) further examined the relationship between trust and the effect on employee engagement, determining that leaders strengthen the level of employee engagement and trust when employees have a say in decision-making, problem-solving, and other work-related activities. Employee engagement is positively associated with customer satisfaction, loyalty, productivity, and profitability (Harter et al., 2002). Harter et al. (2002) also stated workplace research conducted by Gallup researchers indicated qualitative and quantitative data reflect supervisors have a substantial influence over employee engagement, work satisfaction, and employee satisfaction with their businesses. Leaders who establish trust with their employees strengthens employee engagement and work satisfaction.

Employee engagement not only affects internal customers but can have a positive or negative effect on external customer service. Engagement occurs when individuals have an emotional connection with others, and their basic needs are met consistently (Harter et al., 2002). Employee engagement also occurs when employees know their

expectations, have what they need to perform their duties, feel fulfilled in their work, perceive they are part of something significant, and can improve and develop their skills (Harter et al., 2002). Employees become disengaged when they have a negative mindset; a negative attitude can affect how employees treat their internal and external customers (Menguc et al., 2013). Employee engagement can positively or negatively impact customers' views of the service they receive (Menguc et al., 2013). Disengaged employees exhibit negative attitudes towards their work and can negatively affect internal and external customers.

Employer feedback is crucial to employee performance and increasing employee engagement. Leaders can positively impact or increase employee engagement by providing precise information about employee performance outcomes and suggestions for improvement (Jaworski & Kohli, 1991). Developmental feedback and accurate guidance assist employees in becoming more effective (Jaworski & Kohli, 1991), fostering communication, and improving performance because they sense supervisors are interested in their growth, motivating employees to be more engaged (Menguc et al., 2013). The fourfold typology of feedback consists of positive output feedback, negative output feedback, positive behavioral feedback, and negative behavioral feedback (Jaworski & Kohli, 1991). The four typologies provide feedback and provide employees with the expected results and how well employees are performing concerning their expectations.

Diversity and inclusion can have a positive effect on increased employee engagement. Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends (2020) reported the sense of being

respected and treated fairly is at the top of their report. A large part of business' diversity and inclusion efforts involve promoting respect and fairness and is an effort that can pay off in employee engagement (Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends, 2020). A 2019 study estimated there was a 56% rise in job performance, a 50% decrease in turnover risk, and a 75% reduction in employee sick days derived from workplace belonging (Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends, 2020). Employee engagement has a significant effect on elevated job performance, reduced turnover, and a significant reduction in employee's absences from work.

It is critical that leaders provide sound feedback to influence increased employee engagement. Leadership support is positively related to increased employee engagement (Menguc et al., 2013). While a lack of supervisor feedback can create confusion about what is expected, cause ambiguity and conflict (Jaworski & Kohli, 1991), leaders who provide corrective measures can get employees back on track and motivate employees to be more engaged (Menguc et al., 2013). Developmental feedback from leaders is also related to positive employee engagement (Menguc et al., 2013). Feedback from leaders assist in building trust between leaders and followers.

Engaged employees are more productive because they are more focused than their counterparts. Employees who find meaningfulness in their work become more dedicated and involved in their jobs, increasing employee engagement (Menguc et al., 2013). Harter et al. (2002) reported engagement is positively related to loyalty, profitability, and productivity. Therefore, leaders who proactively take steps to not only measure engagement but take the necessary actions to address employee engagement are more apt

to achieve increased employee engagement with their employees (Matthews, 2018). The risks of disengaged employees develops when employees become aware of the gap between the rhetoric and reality of measures taken to increase employee engagement (Matthews, 2018). When employees become disengaged their work begins to decline. Leaders can increase employee engagement when they take active steps to communicate, encourage innovation, and present strong leadership by implementing a leadership style that caters to the need of the individual or group.

Transition

In Section 1, I addressed the background of the problem leaders face involving ongoing challenges in engaging employees using current leadership practices. Businesses require influential leaders who can positively influence followers by bolstering employee engagement to support and increase their performance. I also addressed the problem statement, purpose statement, nature of the study, conceptual framework, operational definitions, significance of the study, and literature review. In Section 2, I reiterate the purpose statement and define the role of the researcher and participants. I also further discuss the research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments, data collection technique, data organization techniques, data analysis, and reliability and validity. In Section 3, I present the study findings, applications to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, and further research.

Section 2: The Project

I detailed the purpose of this qualitative case study to explore strategies business leaders used to increase employee engagement. This section includes information about the role of the researcher and participants. The research method, research design, population and sampling procedures, ethical research, data collection instruments, data collection technique, data organization techniques, data analysis, and reliability and validity are addressed in this section.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies business leaders used to increase employee engagement. The targeted population consisted of four business leaders in Virginia. I collected data from semistructured interviews and company websites used by business leaders who successfully implemented leadership strategies that increased employee engagement. Implications for positive social change include the potential to improve human and social conditions within businesses and communities. Promoting the worth and development of employees, leaders, and businesses impacts positive social change because businesses are interwoven into the community, businesses are a part of the community, thus can positively affect the wellbeing of society through improving the quality of services provided to crucial stakeholders, including citizens.

Role of the Researcher

As a researcher, it is my ethical duty to practice reflexivity. I ensured honesty and transparency during interactions with participants to enhance trustworthiness and

dependability by ensuring findings of the study were not obstructed by personal bias. I adopted the practice of reflexivity and mitigated personal bias by implementing member checking, which involved permitting participants to review and correct interpretations of data. In addition, I employed data triangulation, which involved instituting more than one data collection method to ensure validity and credibility. The two data collection tools I used were Audacity, an audio-editing software, and a mini digital voice recorder. This added depth and richness to the research by ensuring data accurately reflected views of participants. Interview questions were also constructed to address participants' experiences and strategies to increase employee engagement in businesses and avoid my opinions.

As an employee of public sector organizations for 19 years, I am familiar with constraints of employee engagement. I was a part of a committee for 4 years that monitored and implemented strategies to improve the cultural environment. I sat on committees to develop employee engagement strategies outside of the local office within the Virginia Department of Social Services. Although I have experience implementing strategies to improve cultural environments, I did not interview committee members.

The case study consisted of open-ended interview questions using multiple means of collecting and transcribing information. Participants received a preprepared participant information sheet, consent form, and a brief synopsis concerning the purpose of the research before interviews to allow familiarization with the topic and promote validity and reliability. I also answered any questions participants had regarding the information sheet and how information would be stored to maintain confidentiality. My years of

experience in the public sector helped me build rapport with participants, understand their responses, and ask meaningful followup and probing questions.

Participants

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to provide strategies business leaders used to increase employee engagement. Participants were involved business leaders who successfully implemented strategies that increased employee engagement. To ensure participants met the requirements to participate in this study, I asked whether they were business leaders in the state of Virginia and had successfully implemented strategies that increased employee engagement.

To gain access to participants, I first obtained approval from the Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB), approval number 06-17-22-1004988. I visited participants in person to identify the appropriate person to contact for permission to conduct the study. Obtaining approvals to interview potential participants was not challenging. It required me to establish a rapport with the potential participants as well as clear communication and collaboration regarding the purpose of the study, time to conduct research, and needed resources . Once business leaders were granted access, sampling methods were used to select participants. There are several sampling methods of qualitative research, including purposive, snowball, and quota sampling. Purposive sampling involves preselected criteria, no fixed sample sizes, and limited resources and available time (Family Health International, n.d.). Quota sampling occurs when the researcher has set a determined number of participants relative to size and proportion, the study then continues until the quota meets the requirement (Family Health International,

n.d.). Snowball sampling occurs when participants refer the researcher to other potential participants. According to Palinkas et al. (2013), it is best to use purposeful sampling to identify and select data-rich cases for advantageous resource use. Purposeful sampling was a method to choose qualified participants that met the study criteria. I provided the consent form that addressed information regarding research, time allotted, and my contact information should further explanation of the research process be required. I explained to participants how their contribution to the study can contribute to their business and society.

Establishing a working relationship with participants was imperative to successfully gaining their trust. I effectively communicated the research study's purpose and ensured participants that their information and responses were not shared. Through written documentation and verbal communication, I also assured participants of their privacy and confidentiality, ensuring their name, business name, or any identifying information would not be revealed in the study. I also explained to participants how much time was required and that their participation was voluntary, and they could decline to take part at any time. I also advised participants of the collection method and said their responses would be recorded for ease of transcription to ensure accurate answers. Once participants were informed, I provided them with a consent form. To ensure participants of the safety of their information and responses, I communicated that all information will be secured in a locked security box for 5 years per Walden University's requirement and destroyed afterward.

I sought business leaders who successfully used strategies that increased employee engagement. According to Kalman (2019), the researcher must know the subject matter they are researching. Knowledge of the subject matter allowed me to understand and shape the research process and answer overarching questions participants had, such as how their participation affected their business or influenced future research.

Research Method and Design

In this section, I discuss the research method and design. I have chosen to conduct a qualitative multiple-case study. I explain why I used the qualitative research design instead of quantitative or mixed methods and why a multiple-case study design was chosen rather than a single-case review.

Research Method

The purpose of qualitative research allowed for a more fruitful, in-depth study that brought insight into each participant's experience. The results of qualitative research reflect as textual explanations for "how" and "why" questions, rather than numerical data represented in quantitative analysis (Saunders et al., 2016). Within this study, I interviewed participants to answer the question, "What leadership strategies do some business leaders use to increase employee engagement?" A qualitative study obtained the textual responses needed to answer this question.

A quantitative study would use numerical data that would not provide the word-based responses needed to answer the research question. Researchers using quantitative analysis use variables and an examining approach that seeks to understand the relationship between the variables and would not be appropriate for this study

(Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). Mixed methodology was also not suitable for this study because I did not seek to understand statistical logic within the inquiry but understand how leaders successfully increased employee engagement. A qualitative analysis allowed me to explore the subject area and obtain rich, thick data by conducting a rigorous multiple-case study.

Research Design

The types of research design in qualitative research are phenomenology, ethnography, and case study (Saunders et al., 2016). I employed a multiple-case study to find what strategies business leaders used to increase employee engagement. The use of a multiple case study provided additional opportunities to gain in-depth information to compare findings across cases and agencies. According to Siedlecki (2020), descriptive research allows researchers to describe individuals and events in their natural state. Descriptive analysis can be used in quantitative or qualitative studies and is useful in describing, explaining, clarifying, and validating findings (AECT, 2001). Since I identified strategies leaders used to increase employee engagement, a multiple-case study was appropriate to gauge the validity and success of strategies used.

Ethnography requires an individual to immerse themselves in the culture and environment of a group to learn everyday interactions that can identify and analyze issues (Riera Claret et al., 2020). Ethnographic findings represent rich data from in-depth interviews and conversations requiring deep immersion into the participant's community or environment (Celikoglu et al., 2020). Since I did not research within communities or

environments to identify behaviors that present problems, ethnography was not appropriate for this study.

I considered using a phenomenological research design. Phenomenology uses the lived experiences of others to describe an occurrence (Saunders et al., 2016). There are two forms of phenomenology: descriptive and interpretive. The results of descriptive phenomenology reveal an individual's experiences, while interpretive reflect the meanings of an individual's experiences (Picton et al., 2017). Since I sought to identify successful strategies leaders used to increase employee engagement, a descriptive multiple case study assisted in reaching data saturation. In contrast, phenomenology may have been challenging to reach data saturation.

I also considered using a narrative research design. A narrative study consists of sequential events or studies presented by the participants (Saunders et al., 2016). Narrative research is a storytelling method for individuals to recount experiences (Moen, 2006). This study did not tell a sequential story but determined how and why accounts occurred. For this reason, narrative research was not appropriate for this study.

Using the multiple case study design provided a holistic approach that allowed the integration of diverse situations and a more in-depth understanding of the phenomena (Antunes & Franco, 2016). A single case study is justifiable when the case represents 1) a test of existing theory, 2) an extreme or unusual circumstance, 3) a typical case, or 4) for longitudinal (a study of changes over time) or revelatory (new phenomenon) purposes (Yin, 2018). Single case studies are comparable to a single experiment and can involve one case or a case with embedded units, but are sometimes misrepresented (Yin, 2018).

A multiple case study allowed me to obtain more compelling and robust information while mitigating misrepresentation.

Population and Sampling

This study included participants from four businesses within Virginia. The participants were selected based on the individual's geographical location, employment title, experience, and knowledge. The population sample comprised individuals that met the criteria of business leaders who used strategies to increase employee engagement within the four businesses The number of interviews needed depended on the interview quality, required meetings per participant, and the researcher's experience (Marshall et al., 2013). Interviewing continued until the achievement of data saturation. Data saturation occurred when interviews provided no new information, themes, or coding.

I used extreme or deviant purposive sampling within this qualitative multiple-case doctoral study. Deviant or extreme purposeful sampling allowed for an understanding or explanation of the cases based on the outcomes and permitted me to learn the most to answer the research question. Purposive sampling is a method that provides the opportunity to obtain information-rich data from participants that meet the criteria of the study (Acharya et al., 2013). The extreme or deviant sampling strategy allows the researcher to identify significant common patterns and emphasize or highlight unusual or typical phenomenon in the research (Palinkas et al., 2016). The use of extreme or deviant sampling allowed for an achievable in-depth understanding of the events based on selecting individuals who most qualified and met the criteria to participate in the research

(Palinkas et al., 2016). Extreme or deviant sampling allows for a sample of individuals based on their knowledge, experiences, and willingness to participate.

Ethical Research

Ethical research is a significant component of the doctoral study. To mitigate undue influence and conflict of interest, I did not research my place of employment, as this would not only institute preference but violate ethics. To follow guidelines and implement the practice of ethical research, I upheld the principles outlined in the Belmont Report. Following the instructions of the informed consent checklist ensured participants knew the nature and purpose of the study, expected duration of their participation, and inform participants that their involvement is voluntary (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1979). The Belmont Report provides an analytical framework, guidelines for researchers to follow, to ensure the practice of ethical behaviors when conducting research on participants (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1979). The Belmont Report provided three basic ethical principles I adhered to during my study, respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1979). The Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has the duty of determining whether the research outweighs the risks of potential harm. An essential factor of ethical research is practicing reflexivity (Haines, 2017). The researcher must ensure no direct or indirect harm befalls the participant. Indirect harm can occur during the analysis of the data (Snoek & Horstkotter, 2017). The practice of reflexivity allowed me to understand and acknowledge my perception of the topic, so as not to obscure the findings. As a requirement of Walden IRB, I also submitted an informed consent form to

the participants (Appendix B). The informed consent form protects the participants and advised them of the intent of the study (Saunders et al., 2016). The informed consent form can include but is not limited to: (a) the title of the research project, (b) name of the researcher, (c) statement of voluntary participation, (d) agreed limits about the scope of the participation, (e) procedures to allow concerns to be raised or for withdrawal to take place, (f) acknowledging the recording of the interview, and (g) confidentiality of information.

The informed consent provided the participant's an overview of the procedures. The informed consent ensured confidentiality by advising the participants their names and employer's names will be kept confidential; all data will be in a locked file and informed the participants of their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality of information is also a critical aspect of ethical research. I informed the participants that all information is confidential and will be protected under lock and key, to protect the rights of the participant, and will be destroyed after 5 years. Informed consent protects the participant's data from being exploited.

The final doctoral study manuscript included the Walden IRB approval number, 06-17-22-1004988. The study did not include any identifiable information of individuals or businesses. Finally, I assured the participants, if at any time they chose to withdraw from the study, they may do so without penalty or judgment. The participant may withdraw by stating they no longer wanted to participate in the study.

Data Collection Instruments

In this qualitative multiple case study, I was the primary data collection instrument. Within case studies, there must be at least two data collection instruments (Walden, 2016). I used open-ended semistructured questions during the telephonic interviews, allowing the researcher and participants to actively engage, permitting them to expand on the information and provide more in-depth details. I also actively took notes and reviewed company websites. Using multiple data collection instruments helped obtain a more holistic understanding and a gateway to understand better the research topic and responses.

Semistructured interviews encouraged engagement between the researcher and the participant allowing for a more open discussion regarding sensitive topics (Li et al., 2019). In conjunction with telephone interviews, semi-structured questions enabled participants to expand and provide as much information as they wanted. The use of company websites, in conjunction with semi-structured questions and note-taking, allowed for data triangulation and enhanced the study's credibility. I prescreened the participants by asking prequalifying questions (see Appendix A). The prequalifying questions revolved around the research question: What leadership strategies do some business leaders use to increase employee engagement?

To enhance the data collection instrument's reliability and validity, I validated the interview questions through Walden's faculty's approval. I also used the triangulation of multiple data collection methods, semistructured interviews, note-taking, and company websites to enhance the data's reliability and validity. The use of triangulation added

depth to the collected information, mitigated bias, and enhanced reaching data saturation. The use of triangulation added depth and enhanced data saturation by allowing truths in multiple sources to emerge in the study data.

To increase reliability and reduce bias, I followed the interview protocol (see Appendix A). I obtained permission to record the interview. I asked probing questions with a focus or direction to explore further responses significant to the research topic. I demonstrated attentive listening skills to understand the participant(s) explanations and meanings. I also reduced the scope of bias by avoiding comments or non-verbal behavior and adopted an open posture so as not to encourage or inhibit the flow of the discussion. Shortly after the interview, I compiled a full record of the interview by logging contextual data. Registering the contextual data optimized the discussion's value and ensured no mix up in the data from different interviewees. This contextual data was stored separately from the interview transcripts to ensure the participants' anonymity, as promised. There was no link between the transcripts and the contextual data except by using an impersonal code number (key) that will be kept securely and separately, not by those who control the data.

Data Collection Technique

The research question was: What leadership strategies do some business leaders use to increase employee engagement? I used semistructured interview questions, note-taking, and review of company websites as data collection methods. Keles and Altinok (2020) advised using semistructured interviews as the data collection technique allows

the participant to elaborate on their answers. Semistructured interviews also prompted the researcher to further the discussion.

I was the primary data collection instrument within this qualitative multiple case study. Once the potential participant approved the survey within their business, I clarified the study's purpose, explained the potential participant's voluntary participation, and provided the consent form. I advised each participant that they can withdraw from the study at any time. Burmansah et al. (2020) suggested interviewing in conjunction with other data collection techniques, such as company documentation, can render results that reflect the participant's authentic experiences that help answer the research question. In the place of company documentation, I used company websites to enhance the information obtained from the participants.

Before conducting the study, the participants were pre-screened to ensure they met the criteria to participate in the study. I pre-screened them by asking one closed-ended question and followed up with an open-ended question allowing the participant to expound on their response. The prescreening questions were as followed: Have you implemented leadership strategies to increase employee engagement? If so, what strategies have you used, and how did you measure increased employee engagement? The first question was closed-ended, which rendered a yes or no response. I presented the follow-up question as open-ended to allow the participant to answer and elaborate on their response.

Upon speaking with the participants and included in the consent form, I advised the participants of the need to audio-record the interview if they were selected to

participate. If participants did not agree to audio-recording, I would thank them for agreeing to participate and advise they were not chosen to participate in the study. Once I attained the number of participants to participate in the study, I corresponded with them to obtain their preferred method to interview and advised the interview length. The participants and I established the date and time, and I met with the participants as scheduled.

While face-to-face interviewing is a preferred data collection technique in qualitative research, face-to-face cross-questioning has disadvantages. Opdenakker (2006) suggested the downside of face-to-face interviews include the unawareness of unintended social cues, such as body language or facial expressions. Replacing in-person meetings with other practices were not preferential for participants as none were hard to reach and there were no sensitive topics.

Data Organization Technique

The data organization technique used in this qualitative study was significant in that it advised the method of securing the data and the means of destroying the information after the 5-year retention period. The university requires the data to be retained for no more than 5 years. I communicated to the participants that the data will be kept in a secured locked safety box, only accessible to myself. I advised each participant, once the retention period is over, I will erase data stored on flash drives, and shred paper documents in a cross-shredder.

Data Analysis

I used multiple triangulations of data sources, such as interviewing, note-taking, and using company websites, as sources of collecting the information. Methodical triangulation is using more than one method to collect data to investigate the research question (Saunders et al., 2016). Data analysis processing uses techniques to explore and determine complex relationships and patterns among the data (Ghorpade & Sonkamble, 2020). The use of data triangulation allowed me to explore relationships and patterns among the data provided by the participants.

I transcribed the audio-recordings from the interviews, interview notes, and company websites into a Word document. I imported the Word documents from each participant into an Excel spreadsheet. Manual coding allowed for a rigorous examination to identify themes, patterns, and relationships in the data. Once I finished manually coding, I examined the content to determine if the coding was accurate. The review of the coding established whether themes needed to be combined to create broader themes, be analyzed into more specific categories, or grouped to form a hierarchy. I referenced coding for the participant's interview responses (e.g., P1, P2, etc.).

Categorizing themes allowed for the emergence of a common theme to correlate with the literature. I researched the common themes through search engines that offer peer reviewed journals and articles to align with the chosen conceptual frameworks, situational leadership, and transformational leadership theories. There are five specific techniques for analyzing case studies: explanation building, pattern matching, time-series analysis, logic models, and cross-case synthesis (Yin, 2018). I used the pattern matching

analysis to match themes or strategies to the constructs in the theories being applied in this study. I used Yin's five steps of analysis for the study which included (a) compiling data, (b) dissembling data, (c) reassembling data, (d) interpreting data, and (e) reaching conclusions. Once I manually identified codes and themes, I associated the themes, interviews, company websites, and notes to this study's conceptual framework.

Reliability and Validity

Achieving rigor or validity and reliability is an ongoing concern in qualitative research (Cypress, 2017). However, the concepts of reliability and validity are necessary for qualitative research (Cypress, 2017; Spiers et al., 2018). In this qualitative multiple-case study, it was my intent to identify the research as transferable, credible, dependable, and confirmable.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the replicability, repeatability, and stability of the results (Cypress, 2017). Because I conducted open-ended interviews using semistructured questions, I avoided directing the participant's responses, which assisted in the reliability of the data results. Although results may have a margin of variability, the data may be ontologically similar but differ in richness and ambiance (Leung, 2015). Researchers should verify their accuracy alone or with peers by using triangulation (Leung, 2015). I used triangulation by comparing the information collected from the interview questions, websites, note-taking, and digital voice recorder. The semistructured interviews were uniform for all participants and the same format was used for collecting data. Transcript review ensures dependability because a copy of the interview transcript is sent to each

respective participant so they can review the document (Rowlands, 2021). I employed transcript review to ensure the dependability of the research results.

To ensure validity and reliability, I allowed the participants to review the interpretations of the summaries. As a part of member checking, after each interview was completed, I summarized the interpretations of the participant and presented this data to the participant to validate that my interpretations were accurate. Validity also occurred during the achievement of data saturation (Cypress, 2017). I achieved data saturation by collecting data until additional data yielded no new themes or information. When no new information was received from other participants and the information was redundant and I was unable to obtain new information, data saturation had been reached.

Validity

I worked to achieve credibility by performing member checking and triangulation. Credibility, confirmability, and transferability are criteria for trustworthiness (Cypress, 2017). Member checking is a form of social accountability where researchers communicate with the participants to review the summaries and confirm accuracy (Naidu & Prose, 2018). Abdalla et al. (2018) defined triangulation as the ability to look at the same phenomena from different angles to confirm, illuminate, or develop the research problem. Member checking occurred at the end of each interview. Data triangulation occurred throughout the research process to understand the phenomena and test the validity of the data.

Credibility

Credibility is the accurate and truthful depiction of a participant's experiences (Cypress, 2017). Schwandt et al. (2007) suggested lengthy engagement with the respondent, cross-checking of the data, and member checks as techniques to increase credibility. I continuously checked the data and interpretation with the participants to help achieve member checking and ensure a truthful depiction of the participant's experiences. As part of my member checking technique, each participant reviewed the summaries of my interpretations to ensure I captured correct responses. During this phase, the participant had the opportunity to make changes, make corrections to their answers, or advise if the summaries were accurate.

Confirmability

Confirmability is a criterion of trustworthiness and attained during the corroboration of the study's results (Cypress, 2017). I ensured confirmability by conducting member checking with the participants after the interview process. Upon completion of the interviews, I conferred with the participants to ensure my interpretations were accurate. I also asked probing questions and sought different perspectives during the interview to enhance confirmability. Asking probing questions was helpful in obtaining more in-depth information.

Transferability

I adhered to the data collection and analysis techniques for the research design using analytical generalization. Analytical generalization refers to making projections about the transferability of the findings (Yin, 2018). Implications from the analytical

generalization led to a greater understanding about the 'how' and 'why' questions posed in the study (Yin, 2018). Transferability refers to the study results being applicable in other contexts or for future research (Cypress, 2017). I interviewed participants who met the research question criteria until there were no new information revelations, and I used an interview protocol that allowed for the transferability of the study's results.

Data saturation is important to achieve. In a case study design, multiple data collection methods are essential to ensuring data saturation (Carlsen & Glenton, 2011). Data saturation was achieved when no new codes could be identified, no new information, and no new themes in the research findings were apparent. I used in-depth interviews to reach data saturation and to triangulate the data for analysis to reveal the findings of the study.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I presented the research method and design used in this qualitative case study to explore business leaders' strategies to increase employee engagement. Section 2 includes the purpose statement and the role of the researcher and participants. I elaborated on the nature of the study and detailed selection of participants. Ethical research is a significant component of doctoral research; I addressed how to ensure no direct or indirect harm was possible. I was the primary data collection instrument and actively engaged participants with open-ended semi-structured questions, with the intent of reaching data saturation by using triangulation of multiple data collection methods. In Section 3, I present the study's findings, applications to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for actions, and further research.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies business leaders use to increase employee engagement. Data were collected from four small business restaurant owners in central Virginia who implemented strategies that increased employee engagement. Participants answered four prequalifying interview questions (see Appendix A) to determine if they met qualifications to participate in the study. Each participant answered six open-ended interview questions to identify strategies that they used to increase employee engagement. In-depth interviews were used to reach data saturation and triangulate data for analysis to reveal findings of the study. I used codes to identify each participant (P1, P2, P3, and P4). Four themes emerged through data analysis: (a) selling, (b) participating, (c) telling, and (d) delegating.

Participants noted the importance of strategies used by restaurant business leaders to increase employee engagement by identifying motivational factors that they deemed necessary and executed in their work environment. Valuing their employees was an important strategy that participants used to implement strategies to increase employee engagement. Participants found inclusion of their employees and how they delegate responsibilities was also helpful as a strategy to increase employee engagement. Findings of this study indicated that strategies business leaders used to increase employee engagement yielded more dedicated employees with a sense of belonging and shared passion and vision for the business.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question for this doctoral study was: What leadership strategies do some business leaders use to increase employee engagement? I conducted semistructured interviews and used company website information, as well as notes collected from participant interviews. I collected data until saturation. After conducting three interviews, I conducted a preliminary analysis. After each subsequent interview, I assessed if they yielded any additional themes or information that was relevant to the study. After four interviews, I concluded that I reached the data saturation point due to no additional themes. I manually coded and organized interview transcripts via themes. I used data triangulation to assure validity, credibility, and authenticity of the research.

Four restaurant business owners were interviewed from four different restaurants in Virginia to reach data saturation. Participants are labeled P1, P2, P3, and P4 for confidentiality purposes. Demographics of participants are presented in Table 1, along with race and gender. All four participants are restaurant business owners. After interview transcription, I shared with each participant a summary of my interpretation of data for member checking to verify accuracy of their responses to interview questions.

Table 1

Demographics

Participants	Gender	Race	Title
P1	Male	White	Restaurant owner
P2	Male	White	Restaurant owner
P3	Female	Black	Restaurant owner
P4	Male	Black	Restaurant owner

P1 operates a family-owned country cuisine and sandwich restaurant/diner that was established in 2017 in the current locality after a 7-year hiatus. The family-style full-service restaurant has a staff of eight employees. P1 began his career as a server for a successful chain restaurant and quickly moved to become the youngest general manager at the time.

P2 is the owner of a family-owned business that started out selling desserts in 2012. By 2013, the owners began selling lunch and dinner. P2 said, “we have a Christian faith-based restaurant with a fun family atmosphere where we take the time to be a listening ear and share the love of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

P3 runs a country-style full-service diner that opened in early 2016. The diner is run by mother and daughter and had been the mother’s dream for many years. P3 said she prepares Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners for customers yearly and prepared 27 full dinners during Thanksgiving 2021.

P4 runs a full-service family-style restaurant with his wife. They have been in business for 5 years. Prior to this, P4 was a deli chef for 10 years. P4 has eight full-time

employees and four part-time employees and is looking to expand. P4 stated his passion for cooking came from his love of eating. P4 accumulated skills and traits from matriarchs before him who were accustomed to making full spread meals and enjoyed their cooking. P4 stated good eating is food for the soul.

Theme 1: Selling

The first theme that emerged from the data analysis was selling. P1, P2, P3, and P4 all stressed leading by example as means to motivate employees and increase employee engagement. P1 said, "leading by example is part of what I do and doing my part to keep them motivated is how I increase employee engagement." P1 leads by example daily by "being professional and appropriate and providing quality services." P2, P3, and P4 shared similar views about the effectiveness of motivating staff by leading by example as a strategy to increase employee engagement. Motivating employees by leading by example has a connection to employee engagement and is a sought-after quality in organizations (van Tuin et al., 2020). Situational leadership involves using a directive and supportive strategy that results in leaders evaluating needs of employees and basing style of leadership according to the needs of the individual (Blanchard, 2019). Autonomy and intrinsic reward give employees the motivation they need to become passionate about their jobs (Byrne et al., 2016). Employee engagement involves the employees need for autonomy and intrinsic reward, and when met may result in focused attention and a commitment to business goals (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Providing motivation to the employees by leading by example is a proponent of the 'selling' strategy of situational leadership. The selling component entails high directive and high

supporting behaviors where the leader makes the final decision regarding goal accomplishment.

Participants responses were different but related in terms of identifying the relevance of selling to increase employee engagement. P1 said, “the speed of the captain is the speed of the ship, so if I’m lazy, the crew will be lazy, and if I’m motivated, the crew will be motivated and positive.” P2 said, “creating a family environment and motivating employees and capitalizing on their strengths assists in increasing employee engagement.” P3 said, “I motivate [employees] to stay on top of things and give them encouragement as a way to increase employee engagement.” P4 said, “I motivate my employees by leading by example.” While each participant had different reasons for motivation, they all realized that implementing motivation is a critical part of increasing employee engagement. Participants also stated informing employees of situations is a strategy to increase employee engagement, and all four participants stated leading by example is a strategy to increase employee engagement.

While extrinsic and intrinsic motivation are important, they have different effects in terms of how employees work. Extrinsic motivation comes from external motivations or factors, such as financial compensation or praise and recognition, while intrinsic motivation comes from within and may involve finding engaging activities as challenging or interesting and not seeking external reward (Engidaw, 2021). Business leaders who are motivated, lead by example, and instill a sense of pride in their employees provide a venue for success.

Theme 2: Participating

The second theme I identified was participating. Participating strategies regards leaders forming and strengthen relationships by giving encouragement and soliciting input. Leaders showing appreciation is a part of participating strategies. While managers agree that showing appreciation or value is important, many managers do not know how to convey this effectively (Hamrick & White, 2020) and may want to change how they demonstrate appreciation of their employees. Participants emphasized the need for value and employee appreciation to be shown to capitalize on employee engagement.

Each participant, while they identified employee appreciation in different ways, each postulated that showing employees you value them is crucial to engaging employees. P1 stated, "instilling a sense of pride in ownership is crucial in identifying how leadership strategies help promote employee engagement." P2 stated, "showing value in who we are and creating a family environment is used to increase employee engagement." P3 stated, "giving a sense of humanity is a strategy used to increase employee engagement." P4 stated, "finding the right employee that shares the same vision is a challenge when implementing leadership strategies but finding an employee who has the same values and shares a common vision and is passionate about what they do is... a way to increase engagement."

To show appreciation to employees, managers must not only understand the importance of appreciation but put forth effort to engage their employees. There are many ways to show appreciation to employees, such as words of affirmation, acts of service, quality time, or tangible gifts (Hamrick & White, 2020). By showing appreciation to their

employees, employee retention is more apt to increase, directly impacting business success.

When relating the findings from the data collection to the conceptual framework, showing appreciation and valuing employees has a profound effect on leadership style and how dedicated the employees are to the job. Employee engagement can determine how strong relationships are between managers and employees or teams. Showing appreciation to employees creates better work environments where employees feel valued.

Theme 3: Telling

The third theme I identified was *telling*. Telling includes high directive and low supportive behaviors. Inclusion is a part of the telling strategy because leaders must commit to having the resources and support needed for employees to achieve their full potential. Inclusion can only occur through engagement with employee's understandings of organizational culture and their place within the organization (Cassell et al., 2022). While each participant provided responses that were different, the responses all indicated inclusion is a critical aspect of employee engagement.

Inclusivity is a proponent of diversity, equity, and inclusion and is an initiative to strengthen a company's culture and encourage employee engagement. P1stated, "instilling a sense of pride and making employees feel part of a team by providing clarity and guidance", to help promote employee engagement. P2 stated, "we relate to our employees on a personal level and run our business in a family environment. We listen to our employees and give guidance through a faith-based system." P3 stated, "I encourage

timeliness and understanding and explain to the employees the importance of timeliness." and P4 stated, "trusting in your vision and finding employees that share the same vision" and "knowing your employees" as a means of fostering employee engagement. I inquired with all the participants if there was a manual or handbook that the employees would have to follow and neither business had any type of handbook or manual but used direct instructions to guide their employees.

Theme 4: Delegating

The fourth theme I identified was *delegating.* The delegating approach entails a low supportive, low directive style of leadership. In this approach, the leader allows the employee to take responsibility for attaining the assigned goal.

P1 stated, "my employees are well aware of what needs to be done especially the individuals who have been with me for a while." "Most of my staff are independent and know how to move around the kitchen and the wait staff know what to do." P1 went on to state that 'the new hires need guidance initially but pick up pretty quickly on how to serve."

P2 stated, "my waitresses cook the meals and serve the public. With a small staff it's easier to provide guidance and give direction on how the business is ran. Once the employees have been through training, they know what to do."

P3 stated her business is ran by she and her daughter and very little guidance is needed for her daughter. P3 stated, "I have a few employees outside of my daughter but once the customers have ordered, no other direction is needed." The workers know what

to do. I have to stress timeliness more than anything else; they know what to do when it comes to their work." P4 stated,

> Working in restaurants for over 30 years, it was easier to establish a crew that will be more self-reliant. Working with individuals in the past and knowing work habits made it easier to get the foundation needed to make the business successful. My leadership style changes as my employees grow in the business. There comes a point in time after training that the staff is more self-reliant, and my presence is not needed as much. Establishing trust builds strong relationships in the business.

While each participant identified with situational leadership proponents, selling, telling, participating, and delegating, they also reflected how their leadership styles change as their employee's grow in the business.

Different leadership styles promote employee engagement. While not all employees require the same leadership style, employing a style of leadership such as situational leadership balances each employee's needs based on their willingness and ability to complete a task (Wright, 2017). No one leadership style suffices for all employees, therefore implementing a leadership style that addresses the need of the individual or demand of the business, such as situational leadership, allows a business leader to look at situations from different perspectives.

The company websites revealed the approaches the participants employ with highly skilled and committed workers motivates the employees to work at their full potential, initiating a delegating approach. The websites reflect a positive organizational culture where the leaders provide the appropriate leadership style according to the need

of the employees. The selling style was also apparent in the company websites because the leaders involved themselves by giving encouragement regarding the goal accomplishments.

Applications to Professional Practice

This study provided strategies business leaders used to increase employee engagement. Based on the study's findings, business leaders used strategies such as selling, telling, participating, and delegating to increase employee engagement. Situational leadership focuses on applying skills according to two specific dimensions: task and relationship (Hersey, 1984). Situational leadership is different from transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and servant leadership as it combines and uses the style best suited for the individual and not focusing on one individual approach.

Based on the findings from this study, business leaders can increase employee engagement by caring about the well-being of their employees. Employees spend a substantial amount of time and effort at work (Bartels et al., 2019). Therefore, creating a supportive, cohesive, and productive work environment assists in meeting business goals and increasing productivity because employees become more invested and engaged in their work.

The consequences of disengaged individuals can be devastating to a business causing productivity losses. Although employee engagement is essential for competitive advantage it is an area of concern (Singh, 2016). When employees are not engaged, they are not motivated to complete job tasks and their workplace performance is greatly

deteriorated (Singh, 2016). Therefore, it is imperative that leaders make employees feel valued and listen to their concerns and ideas.

Because of the situational leadership approach, leaders can capitalize on employees' strengths and mentor them on their weaknesses. Situational leaders can relate to employees on a more personal level of need. Situational leadership is the most widely used leadership model (Blanchard, 2019). When employees feel valued, they are more engaged and feel more satisfaction in their work having the propensity for social change.

Implications for Social Change

The results of this study may promote social change by helping managers create a positive working environment for employees that facilitate employee's professional growth. The positive social change implications will also be helpful in lowering turnover among employees improving their financial stability. Research has shown there is a positive correlation between employee engagement and productivity (Choudhury et al., 2021). The results from this study might affect social change by providing an understanding of the relationship between (a) increased performance, (b) higher employee retention, (c) increased job satisfaction, and (d) better customer experience (see Figure 5).

The implications for positive social change include the potential to improve human and social conditions within communities. The significance of promoting the worth and development of employees, leaders, and businesses impacts positive social change because businesses are interwoven into the community, thus, positively affecting the well-being of society through improving the quality of services provided to their

crucial stakeholder's including citizens. Positive social change improves human and social conditions; therefore, leaders can assist in contributing to positive social change by leading employees in a way that works toward the achievement of common goals.

Figure 5

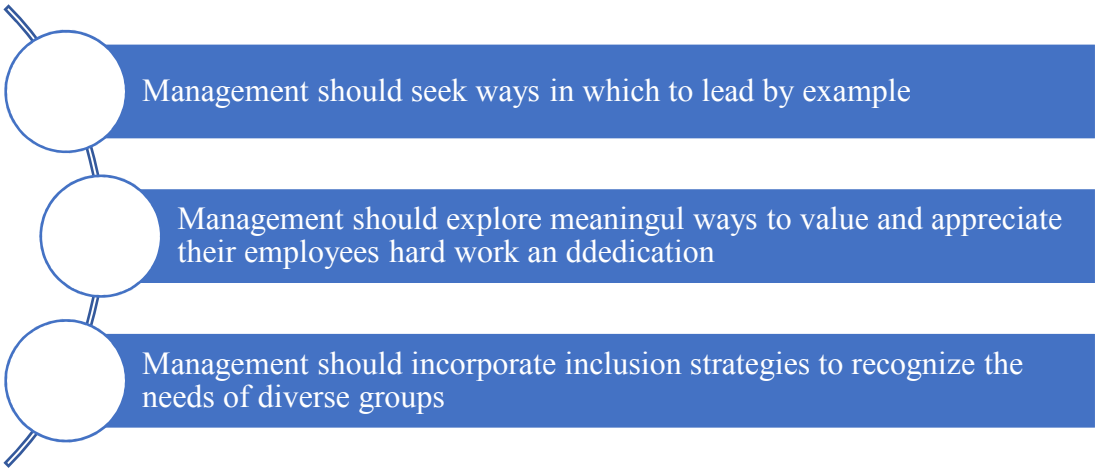
Implications for Social Change

Recommendations for Action

Effective strategies to increase employee engagement should be paramount to individuals in leadership. Business leaders might want to change how they motivate their employees and how they demonstrate appreciation and inclusion. I would make three recommendations following strategies which are based on the results of this study (see Figure 6). The three recommendations are (a) management should seek ways in which to lead by example, (b) management should explore meaningful ways to value and appreciate their employee's hard work and dedication, and (c) management should incorporate inclusion strategies to recognize the needs of diverse groups. These results might be disseminated via literature or training.

Figure 6

Recommendations for Action



Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies business leaders used to increase employee engagement in the restaurant industry in Virginia. An assumption of the study was that participants would be honest with their responses. Because I did not ask embarrassing questions, I can assume the participants answered honestly and to the best of their ability. One assumption was that participants would have the knowledge necessary to answer the questions in the interview. One of the participants did not have answers for two of the six questions which also contributed to requiring a fourth participant. Future researchers could evaluate the same research question under different economic pretenses where businesses are not affected by COVID 19. I would also recommend a study that would expand past the restaurant industry into other businesses and expand the geographic location beyond Virginia to cover a larger population.

Reflections

Reflecting on my doctoral journey, the DBA leadership program has been challenging, yet rewarding. I understand better what is meant by and the importance of data saturation. I began my study with the intent of conducting three interviews to reach data saturation but realized after three interviews I still had not reached data saturation as I was continuing to receive new data. After interviewing a fourth participant, I began to see redundancy, reaching data saturation. I did not have any challenges finding participants, but I credit the ease of finding participants to face-to-face inquiry whether owners would participate.

There was no personal bias that impacted the study, as I practiced reflexivity to understand my values and not let them affect the study. After I concluded the study and reflected on my understanding, beliefs, and ideas as well as the conceptual framework, it occurred to me that the business leaders interviewed used multiple leadership styles versus only one style of leadership. This doctoral study from the beginning was challenging yet informative, took determination, commitment, and faith that it could be completed, and has been very rewarding.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies business leaders use to increase employee engagement. I ensured honesty and transparency during my interactions with participants to enhance trustworthiness and dependability. I also used member checking to ensure findings of the study were not obstructed by personal bias. To ensure validity and reliability, I used methodological

triangulation and data saturation. Following data analysis and member checking four themes were present: selling, participating, telling, and delegating.

Situational leadership is one style of leadership that business leaders can use to increase employee engagement. Face-to-face semistructured interviews and member checking were used to collect data and ensure my interpretation of data was accurate. Data were collected from four small restaurant business owners who survived during the COVID-19 era and increased employee engagement among followers. To encourage employee engagement, business leaders must focus on motivating their employees by seeking ways to lead by example, find better ways to demonstrate appreciation of their employees, and incorporate inclusion strategies to recognize the needs of diverse groups.

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Appendix A: Prequalifying Interview Questions and Interview Protocol

1. Are you currently a leader in a business?
2. What is your position or title in the business?
3. Have you implemented strategies to increase employee engagement? If so, what strategies have you used, and how did you measure increased employee engagement?
4. If selected as a participant in this study, would you agree to an audio recording?

Interview Protocol

I. Introduction of myself to the participant(s)

II. Present the consent form and answer any questions the participant(s) may have regarding the content

III. Provide a copy of the consent form

IV. Turn on the recording device

V. Introduce the participant(s) as a pseudonym and state the date and time

VI. Begin the interview and follow through with completion of questions

VII. Ask if the participant(s) has any questions

VIII. End the interview and advise the participant(s) of the member checking process

IX. Lastly, I will thank the participant(s) for participating in the study and inform the participant(s) there will be a follow-up to conduct member checking and answer any questions the participant(s) may have.