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Effective Health Care Management Strategies for Increasing Employee Engagement and Productivity

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Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Erica Hurd

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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2025

Abstract

Effective Health Care Management Strategies for Increasing Employee Engagement and

Productivity

by

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MHRM, Walden University, 2016

BA, University of Memphis, 2003

Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

March 2025

Abstract

Ineffective strategies to increase employee engagement and productivity can negatively impact business operations. Human resources (HR) and business leaders in the health care industry who lack effective strategies to increase employee engagement and productivity risk business stability. Grounded in self-determination theory, the purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry project was to identify and explore effective strategies HR and business leaders in health care use to increase employee engagement and productivity. The participants were six health care HR and business leaders who had effectively implemented strategies to increase employee engagement and productivity. Data were collected by conducting semistructured interviews. Thematic analysis yielded five themes: (a) communication and meetings, (b) performance management, (c) learning and development, (d) recognition and rewards, and (e) job satisfaction surveys. A key recommendation is for HR and business leaders to be fully engaged to recognize and respond in an appropriate and timely manner to the needs of their employees. This project has implications for positive social change in that a fully engaged workforce that brings their entire selves to work and has meaningful work they are proud of can potentially encourage other community members to achieve similar results for themselves. Having meaningful work may promote strong communities where employees are actively employed, contributing to society, and serving as upstanding pillars of their communities.

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Dedication

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

—Proverbs 3:5–6

To God, whom I lean on to guide my path.

To my mother, Carolyn Gunn, who has been my rock and biggest supporter of my dreams. She is my greatest support and unwavering source of strength, and I owe so much to her for who I am today. Your endless encouragement, selfless love, and belief in my dreams have been my foundation through every triumph and challenge; you've taught me resilience, compassion, and the importance of staying true to myself, even when the path felt uncertain. Your wisdom and warmth have always been my guiding light, and I am endlessly grateful for your sacrifices and support. Thank you for being my rock, cheerleader, and inspiration; your love has been my greatest gift.

I hope to inspire my sons, Jontavius and Anderson, and grandson, Tyjae, to dream big and pursue their goals with relentless determination.

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I want to thank my amazing chair, Dr. Kim Critchlow, to whom I owe this journey. I also thank my second committee member, Dr. Jodine Burchell. Thank you both for the candid feedback and guidance I needed to complete this journey,

To the awesome support of the Critchlow Scholars as we continue to lean on one another: “Run, walk, creep, or crawl, succeed we must.”

Thank you to my participants who provided the data for this project.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Project

Background of the Problem

“Employee engagement” is a common term used in the workforce. Kahn (1990), who developed the concept, stated that employees are either engaged or disengaged in their work and that their levels of engagement can sometimes differ. Consequently, disengaged employees can significantly affect an organization's bottom line when their behavior is not effectively addressed. Employee engagement is a growing concern because employees are less likely to be engaged in their work due to certain factors, which affects their productivity (De-la-Calle-Durán & Rodríguez-Sánchez, 2021). Employee disengagement means employees come to work and are not physically, mentally, or emotionally connected to the work that they are doing (Kahn, 1990). Actively engaged employees bring their entire being to work, whereas disengaged employees are not as involved.

Mental health conditions such as depression play a role in employees' well-being and level of employee engagement (Jindo et al., 2020). The cultural, environmental, and social impact of low engagement can influence employees to the point where they are not physically, mentally, or emotionally present (Joplin et al., 2021). Human resources (HR) and business leaders are challenged to keep employees engaged and productive at work, especially during stressful times in their lives (De-la-Calle-Durán & Rodríguez-Sánchez, 2021). By implementing strategies to improve employee engagement, business leaders can potentially affect positive social change through improved satisfaction among

customers and employees, the latter of whom may also possibly experience decreased stress levels (Jindo et al., 2020).

Business Problem Focus and Project Purpose

The specific business problem was that many HR and business leaders in the health care industry lacked effective strategies to increase employee engagement and productivity. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry research project was to identify and explore effective strategies HR and business leaders in health care use to increase employee engagement and productivity. The specific population group for the project consisted of six HR and business leaders in the health care industry who had used effective strategies to increase employee engagement and productivity. The sampling methods that were used for the project were purposive and snowball sampling methods. Purposive sampling targets specific industry knowledge (Busetto et al., 2020; Campbell et al., 2020). Snowball sampling methods can be included with purposive sampling when current participants can refer other participants with like knowledge (Naderifar et al., 2017). Data saturation was reached with a sample of six HR and business leaders.

The data sources consisted of primary and secondary data. I gathered the primary data by conducting semistructured interviews with the HR and business leaders. The secondary data were comprised of available public documents, Gallup polls, government websites, and artifacts. I identified and accessed the HR and business leaders through professional networks, LinkedIn, the Society for Human Resource Management, and other professional associations. The conceptual framework for this project was the self-determination theory (SDT). The SDT focuses on how employees act if rewarded for

doing something they enjoy (Gagné, 2014). SDT relates to people's basic needs and how they are motivated to make their own decisions (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan introduced the SDT in the 1980s (Deci & Ryan, 1985)

Research Question

What effective strategies do HR and business leaders in health care use to increase employee engagement and productivity?

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

Assumptions refer to a researcher's belief that the information provided to them is true. Assumptions can be either weak sampling assumptions or strong sampling assumptions (Ransom et al., 2023). Certain assumptions of mine may affect this study. I assumed that HR and business leaders used effective strategies to promote employee engagement. Second, I assumed that the participating HR and business leaders were bias-free. Last, I assumed that the participants would answer all interview questions honestly and would have used effective employee engagement strategies.

Limitations

Limitations are weaknesses outside the researcher's control (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). An example is facts whose veracity cannot be determined due to lack of access to information. A potential limitation might be my failure to collect complete and accurate research data. Another might be my interviewing less than knowledgeable experts in the HR health care industry or even my ability to secure the correct number of professionals to participate in the project to achieve data saturation. Another limitation is

generalizability. Generalizability is the ability to apply research findings to a broader population (Kamper, 2020).

Transition

In Section 1, I provided a detailed introduction to the background of the problem, business focus, and purpose regarding self-determination and employee engagement. Employee engagement can range from active to inactive and can affect an organization's productivity. My aim in conducting this project was to explore strategies to increase employee engagement and productivity. In Section 2, I conduct an exhaustive review of the academic literature on the conceptual framework of SDT and employee engagement. In Section 3, I discuss project ethics, the nature of the project, population, sampling and participants, data collection, interview questions, reliability, and validity. In Section 4, I present the findings.

Section 2: The Literature Review

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The academic review comprises research of literature on employee engagement, motivation, well-being, and SDT, which is used to examine strategies used to increase workplace engagement, motivation, and productivity. The research project's overarching research question will answer is what effective strategies HR and business leaders in health care use to increase employee engagement and productivity. The review begins with exploring the conceptual framework that will be used as the lens through which to view the phenomenon. The constructs of the SDT, how it relates to the phenomenon, effective employee engagement, and the different levels of motivation available in health care will be explored. Some initial themes and subthemes that emerged from the academic review are autonomy, competence, relatedness, intrinsic motivation, amotivation, and how employees are motivated. Furthermore, literature regarding employee engagement and how it relates to productivity in the current health care industry post the COVID-19 pandemic was explored. The pandemic had a negative impact on employee engagement in the workforce (de Vries et al., 2023).

Search Strategies

The literature review included a search of peer-reviewed journal articles, reports, and scholarly seminal books for research covering employee engagement and SDT. The keywords included *self-determination theory, autonomy, competence, relatedness, intrinsic motivation, employee engagement theory, goal-path theory, employee engagement, work engagement, productivity, reward, recognition, health care*

professionals, work performance, job satisfaction, motivation, health care, lost productivity, and leadership style. I used the Thoreau Multi-Database Search, LexisNexis, EBSCO Discovery Service, ABI/INFORM Complete, Business Source Complete, ProQuest, and SAGE Premier tools databases to find relevant literature. The search engine Google Scholar was also used. Many sources used in the literature review came from the following journals: *International Journal of Human Resource Management, Social Behavior and Personality, Journal of Organizational Behavior, Journal of Occupation Health, and International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health.* Table 1 provides an overview of the literature review sources.

Table 1

Literature Review Sources

Source	No. total sources	No. peer reviewed	No. non-peer reviewed	No. < 5 years	No. > 5 years
Journal articles	69	69	0	57	12
Official governmental/other source	4	0	4	3	1
Book	5	0	5	0	5
Total no.	78	69	9	60	18
Total %	100	85	15	70	30

Application to the Applied Business Problem

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry research project was to identify and explore effective strategies HR and business leaders in health care use to increase employee engagement and productivity. The lack of engagement may contribute to turnover rates in the long-term health care industry (World Health Organization, 2023). I examined previous research on employee engagement, motivation, well-being, and

productivity. I found that the SDT conceptual framework can support the insight needed to develop further strategies for health care management to increase employee engagement and productivity. Accordingly, these strategies may contribute to a more productive workforce.

Conceptual Framework

Self-Determination Theory

Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan introduced the SDT in the 1980s (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The work started in the 70s, focusing on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in the education industry, which led Deci and Ryan to develop the self-determination framework (Ryan & Deci, 2020). I chose the SDT as the lens through which to view the phenomenon of study. The SDT focuses on how employees act if rewarded for doing something they enjoy (Gagné, 2014). SDT relates to people's basic needs and how they are motivated to make their own decisions (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Those basic needs are autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Stanišić & Čerović, 2021). The SDT's basic needs for employees are the right to make decisions, feel that their work matters, and that they do good work (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The work of Ryan and Deci set the foundation for SDT and the study of motivation to impact the workforce positively.

SDT has been widely studied across disciplines and industries, including education, psychology, sports, employment, and business. Numerous studies have been conducted to understand the relationship between employee engagement and productivity (Grabowski et al., 2021; Shirina & Sharma, 2021; Whiteoak et al., 2023). Health care professionals are challenged daily to motivate employees regardless of working

conditions. Autonomous motivation leads to intrinsic motivation, which is based on the actual work environment and the organization's readiness to meet the needs of its employees (van Tuin et al., 2021). Although autonomous motivation stands out the most, it is up to employers to understand the employees' basic needs. It gives employees the right to choose what is most important to them.

The current state of the health care workplace is leaving leaders with the challenge of maintaining productive work environments while at the same time managing change (de Vries et al., 2023). SDT was initially introduced to determine how students were motivated in the education industry and then expanded to include other industries, including business and work (Ryan & Deci, 2017). However, over the years, SDT research focused on people's ability to grow and mature their intrinsic autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs. Employees are dedicated to their work and want to do good when they connect work engagement and motivation (Ghosh et al., 2020). Individuals are either intrinsically motivated or extrinsically motivated.

Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness

The SDT constructs comprise the three innate basic needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Autonomy is the need to have the freedom to add value to any work situation (Tafvelin et al., 2019). Autonomous employees with increased decision-making abilities tend to be more proactive and creative and share more ideas. Those ideas create autonomous motivation, which also increases performance and productivity to glean satisfaction and well-being (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Autonomy should lead to situations that may result in improving efficient

and productive outcomes. Meanwhile, nonautonomous employees may experience less control and be faced with an uncertain work environment (Gagné et al., 2022), resulting in unreliable outcomes. The next construct is competence, which is to handle situations with skills and abilities that one can be proud and confident of (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Employee competence increases when employees have the autonomy to control their work and receive positive feedback (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Overall, competence is an indicator that furthers the cause of SDT.

The last construct is relatedness, which is connectedness to a cause and being motivated to belong (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Relatedness is having meaningful work that significantly contributes to an organization where the work being done matters. Meaningful work reduces the negative consequence of an unproductive work environment. SDT posits that employees respond differently to motivation and the three innate basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which determine how employees may react or respond to their work environment (Autin et al., 2022). Employees' internal motivation levels increase when satisfied with the three innate basic needs.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

Self-determination is further explained by intrinsic motivation, which is most apparent in employee performance when their duties are exciting and meaningful to them personally. Intrinsic motivation is when something is done because that person wants to do it, whereas extrinsic motivation occurs when it is required, forced, or pressured with rewards or financial incentives (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Intrinsic motivation is when

employees are self-motivated to do something for fulfillment and satisfaction. Extrinsic motivation is when employees do something for reward or payment. Extrinsically motivated employees focus more on outward success and praise (van Tuin et al., 2021). Amotivation is the lack of motivation to complete a given task or the lack of full engagement in the task or work (Grabowski et al., 2021) Intrinsic motivation overall improves satisfaction, creativity, performance, and productivity.

Employees are more satisfied when focused on their essential psychological needs (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Gagné and Deci (2005) noted that research studies in work organizations promoted the basic needs that increase performance and satisfaction. Autonomy factors into the psychological needs' equation creating a more meaningful work situation for employees (Autin et al., 2022). Autonomous employees with increased decision-making abilities tend to be more proactive and creative and share more ideas. In contrast, nonautonomous employees may experience less control and be faced with an uncertain work environment (Gagné et al., 2022), resulting in unreliable outcomes.

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is a leading problem for many organizations. Employee engagement is looked at more closely now than ever since it significantly affects the bottom line for all organizations. There are three levels of engagement: actively engaged, disengaged, or neither, which falls in the middle of active engagement and disengagement (Gagné, 2014). Productivity and cost to an organization's bottom line is a growing concern (Cullinan et al., 2020). According to Gallup's (2023) State of the Global Workplace report, some employees are less productive, waste time, and miss more days

from work when they are not actively engaged (Gallup, 2023). Gallup's (2017), State of the American Workplace noted, 51% of employees were found to be neither engaged nor disengaged (Gallup, 2017). Many employees are just present and not productive. Active engagement is the key for organizations to improve their competitive advantage. In a more recent poll, Gallup (2023) found that this divide continues to increase and has peaked at 59% of employees across the globe, meaning that they are not engaged or disengaged. The literature review and analysis of employee motivation, employee engagement, and SDT will assist in gathering the necessary information needed to contribute to further research.

The current systematic literature review underscores the urgent need to address the global issue of employee engagement (Gallup, 2023; Hayes et al., 2022). The staggering financial impact of low engagement and disengagement, which runs into billions across all organizations, demands immediate attention (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). In the United States and Canada, only 18% of employees are actively engaged, with the top percentile being women, those with advanced degrees, and ages over 40 (Gallup, 2023). Furthermore, data from the ADP Research Institute (Hayes et al., 2022) reveal that those with a flexible schedule are more engaged, but at least 13% still intend to leave, and only 14% of those in the health care industry are fully engaged. These numbers are a stark reminder that employee engagement is an ongoing problem for organizations.

Additionally, researchers have found that organizations have problems due to productivity, decrease in revenue, attendance, staff well-being, and staff turnover (Hassan

et al., 2023). These concerns may affect an organization's bottom line when not addressed efficiently. Low employee engagement or disengagement may be linked to leaders not recognizing that employee engagement is essential and may benefit from a more strategic approach (Hassan et al., 2023). Although this is a project on employee engagement, due to the focus being on the health care industry, customer satisfaction plays a big part in the problem.

Employee engagement directly affects customer and patient experiences, which, in turn, affects revenue and productivity. Highly engaged employees perform better, decreasing all-cause harm (harm to patients no matter the cause) to patients by being more alert and involved in their day-to-day work (Sammer et al., 2020). The all-cause harm study examined the relationships between patient safety, patient experience, and employee engagement in which employees completed a safety questionnaire that focused on questions relating to stress, culture, and management support. Preventable medical injuries can be drastically reduced by focusing on patient safety, patient experience, and employee engagement (Sammer et al., 2020).

Burnout and Employee Engagement

Burnout is another factor that presents problems for employee engagement. Employees who burn out due to low engagement may inadvertently harm patients. Their daily duties are impacted by workload and increased demand, which results in more than 50% of employees' intention to leave the job (Flynn et al., 2024). Thus, highly engaged employees are crucial, and the positive relationship between patient safety (Scott et al., 2022) and positive customer satisfaction (Qi et al., 2023) is essential. Consequently,

employee engagement is at an all-time high and is expected to contribute to the shortage of millions of health care workers (de Vries et al., 2023).

Elevated levels of employee engagement continue worldwide (Hayes et al., 2022). Therefore, a call to action may be needed. Leaders play a crucial role in correcting the problem with employee engagement by striving to improve productivity and job satisfaction, reduce turnover, and increase healthy work environments. Leader's actions can empower employees and create a positive work culture that fosters engagement and productivity (Shirina & Sharma, 2021).

Understanding the factors affecting employee engagement in the workplace ranges from having a supportive leadership team that builds solid relationships to a workplace that encourages employee well-being and an ongoing learning environment to maintain a productive and competitive edge. Some other factors that HR and business leaders should closely monitor are job satisfaction, burnout, employee voice, and turnover. However, employee engagement levels continue to decrease, which impacts the workforce worldwide by more than 50% (Gallup, 2023). The following factors will provide a more detailed explanation of the impact and challenges of employee engagement.

Leadership Support and Employee Engagement

Employee Work Relationships

The problems with employee engagement continue to increase. Leadership support is a concern, and organizations may benefit from building strong working relationships and having a line for open communication (C. Johnson, 2020; van Tuin et

al., 2021). It is up to leaders to provide the connections needed for their employees to be actively engaged. Improving relationships among employees and leadership is a must (C. Johnson, 2020). Leaders who create this environment and connect deeper with employees help employees feel at ease sharing thoughts and ideas (C. Johnson, 2020). Employee engagement starts with building solid relationships. Building these relationships will help employees feel engaged and have a sense of accomplishment with their work.

Communication, education, and mentorship are some ways that employers can take to improve employee engagement. Leaders who take these steps to improve employee engagement can build stronger relationships and improve employee well-being by encouraging a healthy work environment.

Employee Well-Being

Employees are more conscious about their well-being and are taking steps to ensure they are physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually well. Organizations should also be concerned with the well-being of their employees to foster a healthy workplace. Employee well-being is a leading concern in the workforce (Gallup, 2023). Employees working in unhealthy work environments will likely develop an unhealthy state of well-being over time. Consequently, health care employees leave the industry due to work stress, dissatisfaction, and burnout (de Vries et al., 2023). Therefore, a key component of active employee engagement is fostering and supporting a positive workforce (Liu et al., 2022). Employers may improve their workforce by addressing issues with employee engagement before it progresses to less productivity and increased absenteeism and presenteeism.

Absenteeism is unsuitable for the workforce and occurs when employees have more calls out than usual. Presenteeism is when employees show up to work sick and are less productive. However, due to slow productivity, presenteeism has a more profound financial impact on organizations' bottom line (Ho et al., 2022). Employees are productive when employers show interest in their overall well-being, which creates a positive work environment and productive situation for the employee and employer. Active employee engagement and increased productivity win both employee and employer. Employees who are healthy and actively engaged can easily segue into an environment that promotes learning and growth.

Learning and Development

Learning and technology are an integral part of organizational success. Organizations must maintain a competitive advantage to remain relevant in all industries. Organizations that maintain and regularly promote training, development, and knowledge transfer have more actively engaged employees (Tafvelin et al., 2019). Therefore, promoting creativity and innovation in the workforce is imperative. Technology is another piece of the puzzle that promotes learning and development. Organizations must understand how to meet the basic needs of their employees to maintain motivation and productivity as it relates to technology. To stay ahead of technological advances, employers can take steps necessary to meet the needs of employee learning (Gagné et al., 2022). To meet the demand of technological changes, it is important to proactively be aware of trends and train the workforce to stay ahead of the competition. Creative and innovative workforces are more engaged and ready to learn.

Employers can also meet the autonomous needs of their employees by providing ongoing professional development. Employees with autonomy may have a positive impact on the transfer of training which promotes positive outcomes for productivity and can assist with staying up to date on current technology trends (Tafvelin et al., 2019). Overall, learning and development is an essential ongoing training requirement to stay ahead and keep employees motivated and engaged in their work. Other low engagement factors are directly connected and will be explored in the next section.

Other Low Engagement Factors

Low employee engagement may stem from various sources. The research underscores the pivotal role of HR and business leaders in monitoring and addressing factors that can lead to low engagement. Job satisfaction, burnout, and productivity are among the key factors that HR and business leaders should vigilantly track. These factors are crucial in strategic planning aimed at enhancing employee engagement and productivity, underscoring the indispensable role of HR and business leaders in organizational success.

The number of working hours will likely be more significant than those spent at home with family and friends, making job satisfaction an integral part of the work life cycle. Job satisfaction is difficult to define because employees may have different beliefs and values around the concept (Rodríguez-Cifuentes et al., 2020). Job satisfaction determines whether an employee stays or leaves, which can tremendously impact retention, positive or negative (Biaison, 2020). Job satisfaction is detrimental in health care organizations; it is essential to drive positive employee engagement and productivity

to meet the demands needed to maintain motivational levels (de Vries et al., 2023). Job satisfaction directly influences employee's motivational levels and can vary greatly depending on how employees are motivated (Parker et al., 2021). Job satisfaction is essential in maintaining retention to avoid employee burnout and turnover costs.

Burnout is another factor that seriously impacts employee engagement. Research shows that giving employees a voice can diminish burnout while promoting active engagement. Employee voice is like autonomy in that employees who have a voice in the organizations and can speak freely are likely to be highly engaged and likely to stay longer. Having a voice to speak freely on concerns and issues in the workplace can assist in avoiding employee burnout and growing strong work relationships (Pinho et al., 2023). Pinho et al. also notes that having regular meetings with leadership and support groups also aids in employee voice. Employee voice reinforces supportive, solid work cultures that minimize employee burnout.

Low employee engagement can lead to high turnover, a costly organizational burden. Research has shown that turnover can be financially draining, posing a significant challenge for HR and business leaders in performance and productivity (Mittal, 2021). The financial drain underscores the urgency of addressing low employee engagement to maintain retention and minimize turnover costs, highlighting the critical importance of this issue for organizational success.

Scholarly Perspectives on Employee Engagement and Productivity

Employee engagement and its effects on productivity in organizations have been studied often. Potential challenges with employee engagement and productivity are when

employees are not fully engaged at work, productivity generally suffers, costing organizations substantial amounts of money annually. The scholarly perspectives on employee engagement and productivity will focus on how employees can move into deep work, working conditions such as flexibility and hours worked, and the mental health and stress that employees face daily to maintain required job productivity.

Deep work is defined as having uninterrupted, focused work time that allows a person to add value to their work (Newport, 2016). The ability to move into deep work may vary with each employee. Arriving at work and transitioning from home to work mode differs for everyone. Some employees may have the ability to get right into deep work, whereas others may have a routine and a need to relax a bit before getting started. Understanding the significant component of productivity is important since time adds up quickly, and waste needs to be eliminated. Vogel et al. (2022) explored the speed at which highly engaged employees get into their focused routines. They found that each person is different, and organizations may benefit from learning from those who are self-starters and get right into the deep work.

Another perspective is that a flexible work schedule may help employees to be more engaged (Naqshbandi et al., 2024). Naqshbandi et al. (2024) studied 277 employees in universities in Nigeria. They found that employees with more job flexibility positively impacted higher employee engagement because they felt more control and autonomy over their jobs and work. The employees worked and were more engaged due to the freedom to work when and where they decided. The number of hours worked was examined in another study. The relationship between working hours, engagement, and

productivity was negative (Okazaki et al., 2019). Speed of work routines (Vogel et al., 2022), flexible work schedules (Naqshbandi et al., 2024), and working hours (Okazaki et al., 2019) are all connected in that job demands are essential resources needed to promote employee engagement and productivity in the workforce. Mental health factors, on the other hand, can significantly affect engagement and productivity.

The importance of mental health in work is worthy of attention, along with concerns about well-being and work–life balance. Organizations aim towards healthier environments, ultimately increasing productivity when employees are healthier. It is estimated that, in time, mental health disorders in the United States will cost businesses around \$6,000,000,000,000 (de Oliveira et al., 2023), with lost productivity due to absenteeism and presenteeism. The researchers explored 38 studies that focused on mental health and found that depression and anxiety are the predominant mental disorders studied. The impact of mental health on the workplace is a significant concern due to low productivity and the cost associated with productivity.

Stress and strain are other parts of mental health, and they have been shown to influence employees' productivity based on an examination of 250 employees who expressed this in a questionnaire (Ilamathi & Raman, 2021). They found that stress and strain are ongoing problems that would benefit from effective stress management techniques to ensure that the work demands can be addressed without the stress and strain burden placed on employees (Ilamathi & Raman, 2021). Poor mental health and stress and strain are substantial concerns in mental health that affect the workforce.

Mental health concerns for employees in the workplace are growing. An employee's mental health can harm productivity. The relationship between emotional and physical health and daily productivity was examined by the employees using a daily diary to track their mental health (Ferreira et al., 2019). What was found was that presenteeism was associated with the mental health state of the employees while at work but not actively engaged in their work. In essence, although the employees felt mentally unwell, they still came to work, and their productivity suffered.

Keeping employees physically engaged is not the only task of organizational leaders; they must explore avenues to maintain engagement physically, mentally, and emotionally and increase productivity. The scholarly perspectives revealed that employee engagement and productivity are affected for different reasons. Still, the overarching goal is to have healthy work environments where employees are highly engaged and productive, thereby creating an excellent outcome for both the employee and the employer. If mental health, presenteeism, and absenteeism go unaddressed, the cost of the lack of engagement and reduced productivity to the organization will continue to increase.

Transition

In Section 2, I explained the organization of the review and the different search strategies used. I conducted an exhaustive review of the academic literature on the conceptual framework of SDT and the phenomenon of employee engagement. I explained the conceptual framework and the three SDT constructs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. I presented literature on employee engagement and how

employees are impacted daily by their environment. A further exploration and discussion of the phenomenon was conducted to expand on frequently re-occurring themes such as employee work relationships and leadership support, employee well-being, and employee learning and development related to employee engagement and productivity. Last, I provided different scholarly points of view on employee engagement. In Section 3, I discuss project ethics, the nature of the project, population, sampling and participants, data collection, interview questions, reliability, and validity. In Section 4, I present the findings.

Section 3: Research Project Methodology

Project Ethics

The role of the researcher is to collect, organize, and enhance data by reviewing academic literature, recruiting participants, and exploring and enhancing literature to answer the research question. The researcher is held to an ethical standard to ensure that all involved are respected and that the project is conducted with integrity. I do not have a relationship with the HR and business leaders participants that will be included in my research project, nor with the topic or research area.

The *Belmont Report* established guidelines to safeguard all participants. The *Belmont Report* covers three areas: respect for participants, beneficence, and justice (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects in Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). The basic principles of respecting the participants are to ensure they are treated fairly and have the right to make their own decisions. The basic principle of beneficence is to protect the participants from harm. The last principle of justice is to ensure that all participants are treated equally and understand what equal means within the research. I ensured that each participant was treated according to the principles and guidelines in the *Belmont Report*.

The informed consent was used to inform the research participants about the research. Informed consent was obtained before the research began. The researcher also communicates to the participant the pros and cons of the research (Wexler & Largent, 2023). As the researcher, I had an ethical obligation to ensure that the participants knew and understood what the research entails. The participants must also clearly comprehend

the informed consent form and any forms they must sign to participate in the research. I conducted an oral review of the informed consent with the participants to ensure they understood that participation was voluntary. Participants could withdraw from the research project at any time without penalty. Once the participants understood the expectations, they had to sign the consent form to participate in the project. There were no incentives for participating in this research project. All identifiable information has been removed. I used codes to protect the participants' identities and maintain confidentiality. All data will be securely protected for the recommended 5 years after the research is conducted. The Walden University Institutional Review Board approval number is 10-10-24-0519313.

Nature of the Project

I used the qualitative research method. The qualitative method was used to gather detailed information by conducting in-depth interviews and questionnaires (Yin, 2018). I intended to identify and explore the effective strategies HR and business leaders in health care use to increase employee engagement and productivity. I used pragmatic inquiry for the research design since this approach allowed me to interview HR and business leaders for detailed information on their experiences with employee engagement. I identified and explored more detailed information by gathering data on the participants' effective engagement strategies and how to implement the strategies to increase employee engagement and productivity. The qualitative pragmatic inquiry was the research method and design used for this project.

Population, Sampling, and Participants

The specific population group for the project was HR and business leaders in the health care industry who have used effective strategies to increase employee engagement and productivity. The HR and business leaders were identified and accessed through professional networks, LinkedIn, the Society for Human Resource Management, and professional associations. I emailed them to see if they wanted to participate in the research project. The sampling method for this project was purposive and snowball sampling. The purposive sampling method involves selecting research participants with specific knowledge or views on the research topic (Busetto et al., 2020; Campbell et al., 2020). The snowball sampling method may be combined with purposive sampling if recruiting those with the necessary knowledge and views becomes challenging. The researcher may ask current participants to recruit others with similar knowledge (Naderifar et al., 2017). The sample comprised six HR and business leaders and reached data saturation.

The data sources consisted of primary and secondary data. I gathered the primary data by conducting semistructured interviews with the HR and business leaders. The secondary data comprised publicly available documents, Gallup polls, government websites, and artifacts, for example. I consistently followed the semistructured interview questions and protocol to maintain consistency while conducting the interviews. Once I reached data saturation, I interviewed one more HR and business leaders until no new information was presented.

Data Collection Activities

I served as the primary data collection instrument in this project. As the researcher, I collected, organized, and enhanced data by reviewing academic literature, recruiting participants, and exploring and enhancing new literature to answer the research question. I used semistructured interviews to ask participants open-ended questions. The interview was conducted via audio conferencing using Zoom, FaceTime, or Microsoft Teams, whichever suits the participants. The interview protocol was used to maintain consistency in asking all participants for the same information. The research topic, questions, and the intended outcome were described. The participants were asked probing interview questions and follow-up questions when needed. I ended the interview by thanking the participants for participating in the research project. I used member checking to ask the participants to review my interpretation of their interview responses to ensure accuracy and enhance the data's reliability and validity. The interview protocol and questions are in Appendix.

Interview Questions

1. What effective strategies did you use to increase employee engagement?
2. What challenges did you face when implementing your effective strategies to increase employee engagement?
3. How did you overcome those challenges?
4. How did you measure the success of the strategies used to increase employee engagement?
5. What effective strategies did you use to increase employee productivity?

6. What challenges did you face when implementing your effective strategies to increase productivity?
7. How did you overcome those challenges?
8. How did you measure the success of the strategies used to increase employee productivity?
9. In what ways do you support employee autonomy?
10. How do you measure employee competence?
11. In what ways do you support employee relatedness?
12. What other information would you like to share that was not already discussed.

Data Organization and Analysis Techniques

The information collected for the research project was labeled appropriately, I manually transcribed the data collected from the semistructured interview and organized the data by using a data collection log. I used a reflective journal to capture my thoughts as I interviewed and processed the information presented in real time. I used Clarke and Braun's (2013) thematic analysis process to analyze the data while focusing on coding, identifying patterns, and developing themes. Clarke and Braun's (2013) thematic analysis process comprises the following six steps: understanding the data, coding the data, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming the themes, and writing up the story about the data. I used Excel to aid in coding, mind mapping the data, and identifying emergent themes. I anticipated using Excel for proper cataloging and labeling of the data, which was helpful when I needed to correlate the key themes with the

scholarly literature and with the conceptual framework serving as the lens through which the project was being viewed. All raw data will be stored securely for 5 years.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are used in qualitative research projects to ensure the soundness and consistency of the data collected. Qualitative research is usually conducted with interviews to gather rich data from participants and demonstrate the rigor and trustworthiness of the research (Coleman, 2022). Trustworthiness involves dependability, confirmability, credibility, and transferability.

Reliability

In qualitative research, reliability is referred to as dependability. Reliability is when researchers measure results consistently over time (Ahmed & Ishtiaq, 2021). To measure results consistently, I used the same interview protocol for each participant, which ensures reliability testing (Ahmed & Ishtiaq, 2021). Dependability is another name for consistency, when researchers can show repeated and consistent measures in the data collection (Janis, 2022). I used member checking to ensure my interpretations of the information they presented were accurate. Triangulation is used to analyze the data and sources to determine consistent patterns (Coleman, 2022).

Validity

Validity is often a concern due to the difficulty of measuring it in qualitative research. Researchers must ensure that their research is valid, credible, transferable, confirmable, and reaches data saturation (Coleman, 2022). Coleman notes that validity is needed to ensure rigor. Researchers can use the trustworthiness guidelines to enhance the research by incorporating credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Singh et al., 2021).

Credibility

Ensuring accurate information in research is vital. Credibility is when the data collected is believable and reflected in the project (Singh et al., 2021). Some ways to show valid research are recording the participants' interviews and following up with member checking to ensure the participant agrees with the interviewer's interpretation of the data. I used member checking to ensure the validity of my findings and the credibility of the data interpretations.

Transferability

I used the interview protocol to collect data to address transferability consistently. Transferability connects the research findings to broader disciplines (Coleman, 2022; Singh et al., 2021). I used an interview protocol and methodological triangulation to support transferability.

Confirmability

Confirmability is accurately noting what the participants stated during interviews. It is the researcher's ability to avoid personal bias during the research project (Singh et

al., 2021). I addressed confirmability by using a reflective journal to organize the research and explain the project's processes. I ensured that I reached data saturation before concluding the interview process. Once no new data surfaced, I interviewed one more participant to be sure I had achieved data saturation. By following this process, a researcher can connect the research project results, academic literature, and the conceptual framework to address gaps in the literature and inform future research (J. L. Johnson et al., 2020).

Transition and Summary

In Section 3 of this research project, I explored the ethical requirements that it will take to research employee engagement and productivity. This section includes information on the nature of the project, populations, sampling, and participants, as well as data collection activities and open-ended interview questions that would be asked in a semistructured interview with HR and business leaders. Data organization, analysis techniques, reliability, and validity will also be included. In Section 4, I present the findings from the data gathered in Section 3.

Section 4: Findings and Conclusions

Presentation of the Findings

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry research project was to identify and explore effective strategies health care HR and business leaders use to increase employee engagement and productivity in the workplace. Clarke & Braun's (2013) thematic analysis process was used to identify recurring themes. Five themes emerged and reoccurred consistently. The five recurring themes were (a) communication and meetings, (b) learning and development, (c) performance management, (d) recognition and rewards, and (e) job satisfaction surveys. The five recurring themes aligned with the conceptual framework of the SDT as it relates to employee motivation, autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Employee motivation is essential in successfully meeting organizational goals (Noviantro et al., 2022). There was a positive connection between motivating employees and increasing employee engagement and productivity.

The overarching research question was, What effective strategies do HR and business leaders in health care use to increase employee engagement and productivity. The data collection included recorded semistructured interview participant responses to 12 interview questions. The six research participants' identities were masked; they were coded as P1–P6. All research participants completed consent forms and were informed of the strict confidentiality measures to safeguard their identities. All research participants were HR business leaders with over 10 years of experience using effective employee engagement and productivity strategies. They worked in the health care industry. Table 2 shows participants' ages and years in business.

Table 2*Participants' Gender and Years in Business*

Participant (P)	Gender	Years in business
P1	Female	30
P2	Male	25
P3	Female	25
P4	Female	15
P5	Female	30
P6	Female	25

After each interview, I used member checking to confirm the accuracy of my interpretation of the participant responses. Following the interviews and the member checking process, I analyzed the data multiple times, following Clarke and Braun's six-step process. Microsoft Excel was used to categorize and distill the themes. Every participant referenced the five themes in their interview responses. Table 3 shows the total number of references for each major theme.

Table 3*Number of References to Major Themes in Participant Interviews*

Major theme	No. of references
Communication and meetings	28
Performance management	30
Learning and development	33
Recognition and rewards	16
Job satisfaction surveys	25

Theme 1: Effective Communication

A primary driver of organizational success is effective communication, which is also an integral component of effective employee engagement and productivity. All of the research participants confirmed that effective communication was a significant

component of having engaged employees. All participants mentioned some form of communication, noting regular team meetings or huddles were required. They conducted team meetings, one-on-one meetings, team huddles, weekly meetings, strategy meetings, and stand-up meetings. P1 mentioned that daily huddles allow employees to meet quickly for about 10 min to discuss problems or gather feedback if they are working on a project. The huddles allowed employees the support needed to ask questions or seek feedback on a particular issue. P5 mentioned having one-on-one meetings to review if any employees had challenges that needed to be addressed since they were in multiple locations and had to support their employees virtually.

P6 mentioned that all organizations have a grapevine, noting that leaders must listen to positive and negative information. Grapevine communication means unofficial office talk (Indeed Editorial Team, 2024). P6 also mentioned that the grapevine produces a lot of positive strategies by listening to what the employees have to say. Actively seeking employees' input opens effective communication channels (Abduraimi et al., 2024). Reciprocally, when leaders share high levels of communication, it segues into employee autonomy. Autonomy is the main SDT construct that addresses the basic needs of employees by allowing them to have input, make decisions, and contribute to their work authentically (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

The current research is consistent with the initial reach in that effective communication is vital. Communication levels are integral and impact employee performance (Noviantror et al., 2022). The emphasis on effective communication can provide more insight for employees to fully operate in the capacity needed for the job

(Lee et al., 2021). P4 noted that a firm foundation could be established with the model, do, repeat, and if the employee still is not performing, continue to communicate and provide feedback. When effective communication is displayed, organizations increase positive employee engagement, which leads to higher productivity, higher satisfaction ratings, and higher profit (Špoljarić & Verčič., 2022). Leaders establish strong leader-employee relationships when effective communication is displayed. Consequently, the lack of effective communication risks the loss of a well-tuned organization (Noviantoro et al., 2022). Creating an environment where communication is effective and open improves engagement and productivity (Noviantoro et al., 2022). Relationship building goes hand in hand with effective communication.

Subtheme: Improved Relationships

Relationship building is a practical component of communication. The literature shows that by building effective communication, training and development, and mentoring programs, employees are more likely to value their work and be more engaged when strong relationships exist. Trust and commitment evolve when care is taken to build strong communication avenues (Abduraimi et al., 2024). Another study examined listening skills and how they can improve employee engagement (Qin, 2024). All of the research participants mentioned in some form that they worked on building good relationships. P1 mentioned that skip-level meetings were effective strategies for connecting with all employee levels and building trust. P2 noted that building family-style relationships was a must for the employees because they often treated the situations as if they were caring for loved ones.

P4 stated that she helps her employees feel accountable for staying consistent and building relationships to manage the employees if she is absent. Johnson (2020) noted that improving relationships among employees and leadership is a must. Communication and building relationships are effective employee engagement strategies. Building relationships will help employees feel engaged, valued, and accomplished with their work. Johnson (2020) emphasized that employees are more comfortable and readily available to create and share ideas when the environment is pleasant and they feel valued. Further, it emphasizes that employees who bring their whole selves to work are actively engaged mentally, physically, and emotionally, totaling fully engaged employees (Joplin et al., 2021). Effective communication and relationship-building open up transparency.

Subtheme: Transparency

Building relationships requires that leaders are transparent. Transparency helps build trust and increase employee engagement and strong relationships (Ruppel et al., 2022). The current research literature shows that when leaders are transparent, employees are more likely to open up and value the leadership within the organization. Building trust is essential to effective communication (Abduraimi et al., 2024). Three research participants mentioned the need for transparency. They believed transparency is essential in building rapport and the foundation for developing a strong workforce. Overall transparency and strong environmental support can decrease the chances of a negative situation emerging (Ruppel et al., 2022). Transparency allows for room to grow strong relationships and work environments, leading employees and employers to build competitive organizations.

Theme 2: Learning and Development

Learning and development programs are vital in creating a competent workforce. Leaders are tasked with ensuring that information is provided and obtained at a level that creates an effective and efficient workforce. The existing literature confirmed that learning and development were essential in ensuring employees were provided the necessary training to stay competitive. However, all of the research participants mentioned that learning and development (also training and development) are essential in keeping employees engaged in learning as organizations evolve with the rapid pace of change. According to the conceptual framework of SDT, employee competence increases when employees can control their work and receive positive feedback (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The competence construct connects the learning and development theme to the SDT conceptual framework. Competence is the ability to handle situations with skills and abilities one can be proud and confident of (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Therefore, learning and development programs are needed to ensure employee competence in the skills and abilities to perform a given task and daily job duties.

The research participants noted that ongoing development was needed to keep the employees engaged. P6 noted that a combination of ongoing and annual pretests and posttests were required for the workforce. P5 mentioned that development workshops were required after a review, survey, or low-performing areas. Sometimes, one-on-one in-services were needed if a particular individual exhibited any challenges. P3 mentioned a more vigorous and effective onboarding process that included ongoing development.

Ongoing development also included a mentoring program that paired new employees with senior employees.

The new literature supports the learning and development theme, essential to promoting employee engagement and productivity. An onboarding study by Berggren et al. (2024) found the importance of promoting learning and development. The authors studied dissatisfaction with the onboarding process. When the onboarding process was improved and had a hybrid approach, the participants noted an intent to stay. The participants were more satisfied with the job because they understood what was expected and could perform duties more confidently. A study noted that continuous professional development provided ongoing knowledge and increased participant satisfaction (Kurtović et al., 2024). They also suggested that participants in manager roles looked to professional development as a requirement and were more motivated to advance their careers.

When professional development is valued, employees tend to be more committed to the work because of the investment that the organizations offer. Employees are more motivated when organizations invest in professional development (Giallourous et al., 2024). By prioritizing learning and development programs, leaders can effectively increase employee engagement and productivity by showing employees that they are valued and that their ongoing professional development is important, which will positively impact the bottom line. Learning and professional development increase employees' competencies, which relates to the conceptual framework of SDT.

Theme 3: Effective Performance Management Programs

Performance management programs are necessary to determine how well employees perform and if intervention is needed. Performance management was a recurring theme vital to an organization's success. Performance management was consistently mentioned among research participants and was a driving force for employee engagement and productivity. All three SDT constructs relate to performance management at some point in the employee life cycle. Ryan and Deci (2017) three constructs of SDT are autonomy, competence, and relatedness are needed to meet basic needs. Autonomy gives employees the space to be included in goal setting and the ability to make decisions about their work. Competence gives employees the skills to reach said goals and decision-making without being micromanaged. The last construct is relatedness, which gives employee space to connect to their work by having some say or meaning in what they do and how it is done (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Drawing from the SDT's three constructs, leaders can motivate employees to manage their careers and ongoing performance management. All participants provided information that supported Theme 3, effective performance management programs. P1 discussed performance management as an essential measurement to ensure high-quality services were delivered. P3 noted that it was important to monitor performance and productivity to ensure that a process needed to "stop, start, or continue." P4 emphasized the importance of monitoring performance to meet sales goals and how the numbers tell a story. Last, P5 mentioned that quarterly and annual performance reviews were required to determine if monetary compensation was attached.

The current research literature remains consistent in emphasizing that performance management directly impacts employee engagement and productivity. A study conducted in South Africa noted that performance and productivity jointly impact an organization's bottom line, in which the relationship between managers and employees sets the tone for performance (Dlamini et al., 2022). Managers and employees who build relationships are more actively involved, engaged, productive, and motivated. Authors in an Indian health care study address the importance of employee well-being in terms of performance. Employee attitudes and performance were monitored closely to increase job satisfaction (Padamata & Vangapandu, 2023). Effective performance management programs promote workplace recognition, rewards, and job satisfaction.

Theme 4: Effective Recognition and Reward Programs

Theme 4 was recognition and reward, which could be directly related to performance management. The initial literature did not focus on recognition and reward, but high-performance management was always mentioned with recognition and rewards. However, all of the participants mentioned recognition and reward programs as a necessary part of the success that they gained in using effective strategies to increase employee engagement and productivity. Recognition and rewards are related to the SDT competence construct. Similarly, learning and development, performance management, and recognition and rewards are all related in that competence is needed to meet the basic needs of the themes. Recognition and rewards can also be linked with intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is when something is done because that person wants to do it for value and or satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

P2 mentioned that her organization sometimes has funds to reward employees. P2 noted that luncheons and other incentives were offered, like promoting work–life balance or an accommodating schedule when needed. P1 discussed giving away simple prizes and staff recognition of a job well done posted on a storyboard in-office. P3 noted that when funds were limited, they would think of creative ways to recognize employees who perform well, such as a parking space for a week. P6 noted that bonuses were often rewarded along with luncheons, and team competitions were rewarded with food and/or small monetary gifts. Employees feel more valued when leaders recognize employees and/or provide rewards. Valued employees are likelier to perform better than employees who feel negated or left out.

The new research literature is consistent with the information found in the other themes. Recognition is considered a non-monetary reward and an effective employee engagement strategy to show appreciation and support (Naido et al., 2024). The research shows that when effective recognition and reward programs align with employee engagement efforts of promoting financial incentives and career development and growth, it increases employee commitment and job satisfaction (Yadau & Srivastava, 2023). Recognition and reward programs are essential in reaching job satisfaction, ultimately improving employee engagement and productivity in health care settings.

Theme 5: Effective Job Satisfaction Survey

The job satisfaction survey theme reflects the use of satisfaction surveys. All participants mentioned using satisfaction surveys to monitor employee engagement, even though they did not necessarily care to use them. However, satisfaction surveys were

mentioned as being used for various purposes and names, including job satisfaction surveys, employee surveys, employee engagement surveys, performance surveys, and post-review surveys. Satisfaction is important because it is required to meet the three SDT basic needs, which drive productivity and expectations (Gagné, 2014). Research participants noted that surveys were important in addressing issues with job satisfaction. P2 mentioned the need to focus on mental health as a primary concern, and surveys are a good way to gather needed information because employees are unlikely to share openly. P3 stated that surveys are important for monitoring the tone and acting on the learned information to avoid further decreased morale.

Job satisfaction needs vary because each employee is different, and needs are different. Leaders are challenged to meet various needs. However, new literature noted the need to balance employee well-being and job satisfaction (Cantarelli et al., 2023). Physical, mental, and emotional health are current trends and hot workplace topics. There is a positive shift in the success of employee well-being and work–life balance (Yadav & Srivastava, 2023). Job satisfaction and employee engagement increase when leaders focus on the employee’s well-being, mental health, and work–life balance (Yadav & Srivastava, 2023). Mustamu (2024) found that health care employees’ job satisfaction closely aligns with patient satisfaction. Leaders are challenged with ensuring high-quality patient care and providing employees with the necessary tools and resources to balance employee job satisfaction and patient satisfaction. Job satisfaction surveys are critical in gauging how employees feel about their work and creating actionable outcomes to improve job satisfaction while increasing employee engagement and productivity.

Business Contributions and Recommendations for Professional Practice

The research findings in this pragmatic research inquiry project offer notable business contributions and recommendations for leaders to increase employee engagement and productivity. The main point of the research project was to gather effective strategies from HR and business leaders to increase employee engagement and productivity. The initial and current research literature shows the critical need to maintain, improve, or increase employee engagement and productivity to maintain a competitive advantage. The research participants all emphasized the importance of an ongoing need to address employee concerns dealing with job satisfaction. The research participants also noted that significant work is needed to address the need for nonmonetary resources to be available and ongoing.

According to Johnson (2020), leaders can continually support employees to increase engagement efforts in the workplace. A clear and effective communication plan is essential. The line of communication sets the tone for the other themes to emerge successfully. For learning and development programs to succeed, leaders must stay current with industry trends and changes. Leaders can provide lunch and learn events to understand and motivate their employees. The lunch and learns will further the discussion on workplace successes and challenges. Leaders who provide comfortable work environments open doors for employees to share ideas and be more creative, enhancing performance management initiatives.

To further improve performance management initiatives, leaders can increase the conceptual framework constructs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness to align

individual goals with the business strategy. Aligning individual goals and business strategy so that employees have the skills, a say in their work, and can relate to the tasks motivates them to be actively engaged and productive. Recognition and rewards will directly reflect the performance management initiatives in the workplace.

Last, job satisfaction is increasingly important within the competitive work environment. Recruiting and retaining top talent will be challenging. Therefore, understanding job satisfaction is essential. Job satisfaction and employee engagement increase when leaders focus on the employee's well-being, mental health, and work-life balance (Yadav & Srivastava, 2023). A wellness program that promotes well-being and supports mental health will significantly impact productivity.

These findings provide leaders with a combination of strategies to increase effective employee engagement and productivity. The five business contributions are (a) an effective communication plan; (b) an intense learning and development program; (c) a performance management program that promotes autonomy, competence, and relatedness, (d) recognition and rewards that promote monetary value; and (d) job satisfaction program that promotes employee well-being and mental health. The five findings will further the focus on maintaining an engaged and productive workforce.

Implications for Social Change

Effective employee engagement and productivity have far-reaching implications for positive social change. The five business contributions and recommendations all impact an engaged workforce. A fully engaged workforce that brings their entire selves to work and has meaningful work they are proud of can encourage other community

members to achieve similarly for themselves. Having meaningful work may improve poverty levels, build strong communities where employees are actively employed, contribute to society, and serve as upstanding pillars of their communities.

When employee engagement and productivity correspond with the needs and wants of the employees, they are motivated to be a part of something great. Engaging in communication leads to building relationships and trust. Effective communication, strong relationships, and trust improve performance and job satisfaction. Strong performance and job satisfaction add to the recognition and rewards employees often seek, contributing to a strong workforce that impacts positive social change.

Active employment helps boost social change. Doug et al. (2024) found that engaged employees are likelier to push organizations to be socially responsible and commit to corporate social responsibility. Not only does employee engagement contribute to social change, but it also improves corporate social responsibility. CSR is driven by the need for employees to give back to their communities. Employees involved with CSR tend to have a higher “sense of purpose” (Nazir et al., 2024). The relatedness construct connects CSR to social change, driving meaning, purpose, and relatedness.

Recommendations for Further Research

The current study faced limitations with a small sample and health care industry specifics in the Southeast region of the United States. Further research is needed across all industries to understand how employees are motivated to maintain or improve effective employee engagement and productivity. As the research from the participants and the literature review shows, although there are some strategies to engage employees

effectively, more will be needed as changes in the work environment and other trends emerge. Leadership teams worldwide will be challenged to find practical and efficient ways to improve employee engagement and productivity. The benefit of further research will undoubtedly increase engagement, productivity, morale, and retention in a very competitive workforce. Future research may expand to more industries and locations across the United States and other countries to overcome these limitations.

Conclusion

In this qualitative pragmatic research inquiry project, I explored effective employee engagement and productivity strategies used by HR and business leaders in the health care industry. The study used semistructured interviews with six research participants with HR and business experience dating over 10 years. I used Braun and Clarke and Braun's (2013) thematic analysis approach to identify five major themes. The five reoccurring themes were (a) communication and meetings, (b) learning and development, (c) performance management, (d) recognition and rewards, and (e) job satisfaction surveys. The five recurring themes align with the conceptual framework of the SDT as it relates to employee motivation, autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

The presentation of the findings showed that when employee engagement efforts are positive, the benefits are endless for leaders and employees. The key themes discussed noted a continuous need for effective communication, professional development, performance check-ins, recognition, and job satisfaction as drivers to promote engagement and productivity. Employees who are comfortable in their work environment feel valued enough to bring their whole selves to work. Leaders who try to

address the key findings are successful when employees are more engaged and productive. On the other hand, a disengaged employee can cost the organization a significant amount of money. It is imperative to promote employee engagement to ensure that employees are satisfied with their work and that everyone involved will reap great benefits.

The findings from this study concur with previous research. The themes that emerged also align with the conceptual framework of SDT. The study may increase leaders' understanding of the complicated challenges in managing employee engagement and productivity. The key findings offer valuable insight for HR and business leaders to promote effective employee engagement and productivity strategies in the health care industry.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Table A1

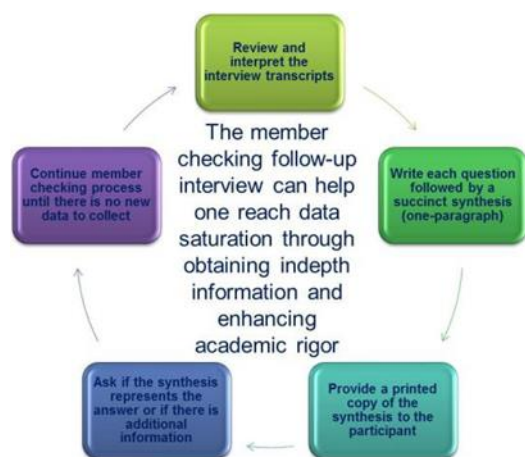
Interview Protocol

Action	Script
<p>Introduce the interview and set the stage. Introduce myself and the purpose of the interview thereby setting the stage.</p>	<p>Hello, my name is Erica Hurd. I am a doctoral student at Walden University. This interview aims to identify and explore effective strategies human resource and business leaders in health care use to increase employee engagement and productivity. I will ask you 12 questions to which I would like you to respond. I will conclude the interview. Do you have any questions?</p>
<p>Watch for nonverbal cues. Paraphrase the participant response. Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in depth responses.</p>	<p>Ask the following interview questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What effective strategies did you use to increase employee engagement? 2. What challenges did you face when implementing your effective strategies to increase employee engagement? 3. How did you overcome those challenges? 4. How did you measure the success of the strategies used to increase employee engagement? 5. What effective strategies did you use to increase employee productivity? 6. What challenges did you face when implementing your effective strategies to increase productivity? 7. How did you overcome those challenges? 8. How did you measure the success of the strategies used to increase employee productivity? 9. In what ways do you support employee autonomy? 10. How do you measure employee competence? 11. In what ways do you support employee relatedness?

Action	Script
Wrap up the interview by thanking participant.	12. What other information would you like to share that was not already discussed. Thank you for your time participating in the interview. The information you provided is an integral part of my research project. I want to schedule a follow-up interview to review the audio and transcripts and confirm I accurately interpreted your response to the interview questions. I will email you the information in advance for your review. Again, thank you for participating in my research project.
Schedule a follow-up interview to perform member checking with the participant.	I will contact you in a week to schedule a time for us to review the accuracy of my interpretations of your interview responses.

Figure A1

Follow-up Member Checking Interview Process



Note. From *Doctor of Business Administration Qualitative Pragmatic Inquiry Research*

Project Handbook (p. 43), by Walden University, 2024

(<https://academicguides.waldenu.edu/research-center/program-documents/dba/traditional-capstone-options>). Copyright 2024 by Walden University. Reprinted with permission.

Table A2 Protocol for Follow-up Interview

Action	Script
Introduce myself and purpose of the follow-up interview to set the stage.	Hello Interviewee, thank you for taking this time to meet with me again to review the accuracy of my interpretations of your interview responses.
Share a copy of the succinct synthesis for each individual questions.	
Bring in probing questions related to other information that I found. Note that the information must be related to adhere to the Institutional Review Board approval.	
Walk through each question, read the interpretation, and ask whether my interpretation is correct and complete. Ask the participant whether I should add anything.	<p data-bbox="868 804 1404 905">I will read the questions one at a time and my interpretations of your responses to them and ask you if my interpretation is correct:</p> <ol data-bbox="868 905 1404 1299" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="868 905 1404 1005">1. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation—perhaps one paragraph or as needed <li data-bbox="868 1005 1404 1106">2. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation—perhaps one paragraph or as needed <li data-bbox="868 1106 1404 1207">3. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation—perhaps one paragraph or as needed <li data-bbox="868 1207 1404 1299">4. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation—perhaps one paragraph or as needed