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Leadership Strategies for Increasing Employee Engagement in the Service Industry

YaVonda Malia Ulfing
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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YaVonda M. Ulfing

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Review Committee

Dr. Marilyn Simon, Committee Chairperson, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Matthew Knight, Committee Member, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Neil Mathur, University Reviewer, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
2019

Abstract

Leadership Strategies for Increasing Employee Engagement in the Service Industry

by

YaVonda M. Ulfing

MSM, Indiana Wesleyan University, 2012

BA, Ball State University, 2006

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

April 2019

Abstract

Companies lose an average of \$1,000 in profit each year for every employee who feels disengaged and uncommitted to the firm's success. Employee engagement is critical to an organization's productivity, profitability, and competitive edge. The purpose of this single case study was to explore strategies that business leaders in a service organization use to increase employee engagement and work performance. The conceptual framework for this study was Homans's social exchange theory. A purposeful sample of 6 company leaders participated in the study based on their success in developing strategies that enhanced employee engagement and performance in an advertising services firm headquartered in Indiana. The study included semistructured interviews to gather in-depth information from participants about their successes related to employee engagement. Conducting member checking with participants and triangulating the data with company documents reinforced the validity of the findings. Data analysis involved using a manual and a computer-aided approach to compile the data, disassemble the data into codes, and reassemble the data into themes. Four key themes emerged: leaders offer attractive company benefits, including flexible work arrangements; leaders empower and appreciate employees; leaders provide professional development opportunities; and leaders foster unity through open communication and team building. The implications for positive social change include the potential to increase employee engagement and performance within firms in the service industry, which can help increase profitability. Higher profitability can enable organizational leaders to financially address social issues such as poverty, which may benefit members of their communities.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave me the strength to persevere throughout this journey. I also dedicate this study to my husband, Mark, and my children, Urijah and Anyaliese, whose unconditional love and support have helped make this dream a reality.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Business leaders are experiencing increased competition due to a rapidly changing marketplace (Beattie & Crossan, 2015; Hicks & Monroy-Paz, 2015; Katz & Miller, 2014). For instance, consumers are demanding better technology, higher quality goods, and faster customer service (Katz & Miller, 2014). In view of these trends, many leaders have developed strategies to ensure their companies are able to meet consumer demand and remain competitive (Daneshgari & Moore, 2016). One of these strategies is to engage employees, because if employees are not performing at their peak, companies are less likely to compete successfully (Al Mehrzi & Singh, 2016; Jha & Kumar, 2016; Taneja, Sewell, & Odom, 2015; Tejpal, 2015; Zelles, 2015).

Employee engagement refers to employees' passion about work, commitment to their company's goals, and motivation to work hard to ensure their company is successful (Kahn, 1990; Karumuri, 2016). High employee engagement leads to high work performance (Mackay, Allen, & Landis, 2017; Neha & Narwal, 2017; Qadeer, Ahmad, Hameed, & Mahmood, 2016; Srivalli & Mani Kanta, 2016; Yadav, 2016). Although some leaders have developed effective approaches for engaging employees and improving their work performance, others still struggle (Plaskoff, 2017). Thus, researchers can explore how business leaders can more effectively engage employees and improve their performance so their companies can be successful.

Background of the Problem

Employees who feel committed to their company, have the right skill sets, and perform well tend to be productive, which can help their company remain competitive

(Anand, 2017; Baker, 2017; Frigo & Ubelhart, 2016; Naik & Srinivasan, 2016; Pater, 2013; Shirin & Kleyn, 2017; Vorina, Simonic, & Vlasova, 2017). However, approximately 71% of employees in the United States do not feel engaged at work, which can lower their performance and affect their company's productivity and financial returns (Jha & Kumar, 2016; Kerns, 2014). Because of the challenges associated with employee disengagement, more business leaders are recognizing the need to know how to engage employees (De Waal & Hanna, 2016; Howard, 2017; Madan, 2017; Pandita & Singhal, 2017), although some leaders struggle to determine the best way to engage their workforce (Karanges, Beatson, Johnston, & Lings, 2014).

This issue of employee disengagement within companies represents an applied business problem that deserves new attention from the research community. Researchers such as Farndale and Murrer (2015) and Izard-Carroll (2016) identified factors that help employees feel engaged at work, including financial rewards and professional development opportunities. Kerns (2014) also identified the benefits of having engaged employees such as better customer service and financial performance. However, many leaders still struggle to engage employees (Basit & Arshad, 2016). New research may lead to new information regarding the strategies that leaders can use to increase employee engagement and work performance.

Problem Statement

Organizations lose an average of \$1,000 in profit each year for every employee who feels disengaged and uncommitted to the company's success (Jha & Kumar, 2016). Additionally, approximately 71% of employees in the United States feel disengaged at

work, which affects employee performance as well as companies' productivity and financial returns (Kerns, 2014). The general business problem was that some business leaders struggle to remain competitive because they have disengaged employees who do not perform their jobs well. The specific business problem was that some business leaders in the service industry lack strategies for increasing employee engagement and work performance to help enhance their competitive edge.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies that business leaders in the service industry use to increase employee engagement and work performance. The targeted population consisted of six leaders at an advertising services company headquartered in Indiana who successfully developed and implemented strategies that helped increase employee engagement levels. This study has implications for positive social change because company leaders who have engaged and high-performing employees tend to be more profitable, which can help financially address social issues such as poverty in communities.

Nature of the Study

The three methods of research available for this study were quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods, but the qualitative method was the most appropriate. Qualitative researchers explore topics using open-ended questions, whereas quantitative researchers statistically examine the relationships between two or more variables (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). Researchers conducting a mixed methods study combine qualitative and quantitative research (Venkatesh et al., 2013). The objective of

this study was to explore the strategies company leaders use to engage employees rather than the statistical relationship between employee engagement and other constructs, which made a qualitative study the best approach.

Qualitative researchers can select from among several design options: case study, narrative study, ethnography, and phenomenology. A case study design was most appropriate for the topic in this study. Case study researchers use multiple data sources to explore one or more organizations, events, activities, or processes to gather information about a phenomenon (Yin, 2014). Narrative research was not appropriate for this study, as narrative researchers focus on the personal stories of study participants (Kourti, 2016). Ethnography was not an option for this study, as ethnographic researchers study an organization's culture and activities over an extended period, sometimes years (Cincotta, 2015; Gaggiotti, Kostera, & Krzyworzeka, 2017). A final design consideration was phenomenology, which involves inquiring about subjects' lived experiences related to a phenomenon (Kaszynska, 2015). However, the aim of this study was to explore strategies business leaders use to increase employee engagement and work performance versus studying participants' lived experiences.

Research Question

The central research question for this study was “What strategies do business leaders in the service industry use to increase employee engagement and work performance?”

Interview Questions

1. What leadership strategies do you use to increase employee engagement and work performance?
2. What talent management strategies do you use to increase employee engagement and work performance?
3. What employee benefits strategies do you use to increase employee engagement and work performance?
4. What employee recognition strategies do you use to increase employee engagement and work performance?
5. What communication strategies do you use to increase employee engagement and work performance?
6. What additional strategies do you use to increase employee engagement and work performance?
7. What other information would you like to share?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was the social exchange theory, which sociologist George Homans introduced in the mid-20th century. Based on the theory, employees experience a series of interactions with company leaders (Oparaocha, 2016; Reader, Mearns, Lopes, & Kuha, 2017). When employees and leaders have a positive relationship, they typically experience a sense of mutual respect and trust.

Central to the social exchange theory is the concept of reciprocity, which means that two individuals who have a positive relationship want to return the benefits they

receive from each other (Karanges et al., 2014). For example, when company leaders foster a positive relationship with employees, employees often want to respond by demonstrating increased work motivation and performance (Ko & Hur, 2014). Social exchange theory was applicable to this study because company leaders who have positive relationships with employees may help employees feel more engaged at work and perform more effectively (Jha & Kumar, 2016; Karanges et al., 2014). As represented in Figure 1, company leaders can use strategies to foster positive relationships with employees. Employees may respond by demonstrating higher engagement and performance at work, which can make an organization more productive and profitable.

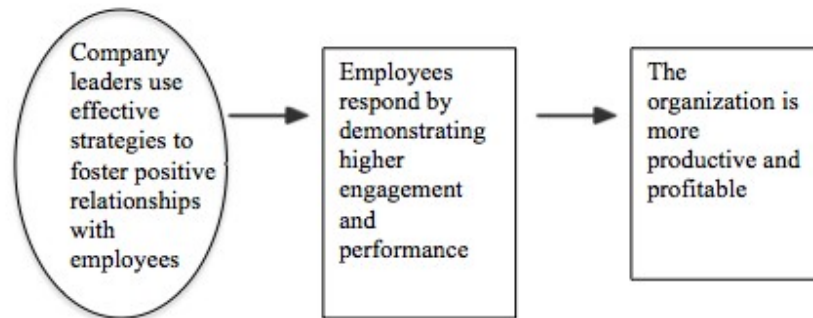


Figure 1. Conceptual model for social exchange theory.

Operational Definitions

This section includes definitions of the terms and phrases related to the topics of employee engagement and workplace performance.

Active employee resistance: Actively resistant employees are disengaged employees who demonstrate an extreme lack of commitment to a company's goals to the point of behaving in damaging ways such as sabotaging meetings (Pater & Lewis, 2012).

Employee disengagement: Employee disengagement refers to employees' lack of passion for their work, lack of commitment to their company's goals, and lack of desire to work hard each day to ensure their company is successful (Banihani, Lewis, & Syed, 2013; Kahn, 1990). Employee engagement is the opposite (Kahn, 1990).

Passive employees: Passive employees are disengaged employees who tend to demonstrate certain behaviors such as not paying attention to company policies, failing to discuss their ideas or concerns openly, or declining opportunities to serve as part of new work committees (Pater & Lewis, 2012).

Work performance: Work performance refers to employees' ability to use their skills to complete job duties effectively (Qadeer et al., 2016).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are elements of a study that a researcher believes to be true without concrete evidence (Siddiqi, 2014). In this qualitative study, the first assumption was that the qualitative method was the most appropriate method to explore the problem under study. The second assumption was that the interviewees did not feel coerced to participate in the study. The third assumption was that participants understood the interview questions and answered the questions honestly. All indications are that the assumptions were met.

Limitations

Limitations are restrictions that may affect the outcome of a study (Bouzon, Cauchick Miguel, & Taboada Rodriguez, 2014; Farooq, 2017). The first limitation in this

study was that the interview participants worked at an advertising services company headquartered in a county in Indiana that did not include a mixed demographic outside of the region. The second limitation was that the results of this qualitative single case study might not be applicable to all workplaces, populations, and industries. The third limitation was the possibility of a lack of participation from company leaders due to their increased workloads, lack of interest, or lack of availability at the time of the interviews.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the parameters a researcher establishes when planning to conduct a study. Researchers usually begin with topic delimitations to determine the specific topic for a study (Bouzon et al., 2014). For example, the topic for this study was employee engagement and work performance, rather than other phenomena such as employee turnover. Another parameter for the study was that participants had to work at an advertising services company headquartered in Indiana, where company leaders experienced high employee engagement and work performance. The third parameter was using purposeful sampling to determine the study's six interview participants, which involves a targeted rather than a random selection of study participants (Karanja, 2017).

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

Business leaders may use findings from this study to develop strategies to increase employee engagement and work performance. High employee engagement and work performance can lead to the following business outcomes: lower attrition, higher productivity, a positive company reputation, business growth, and higher financial

performance (Banihani et al., 2013; Benedetto & Thompson, 2013; Jha & Kumar, 2016; Karanges et al., 2014; Kerns, 2014). Business leaders who use findings from this study may experience the benefits of an engaged and high-performing workforce.

Implications for Social Change

The findings from this study may contribute to social change. Engaged employees tend to have positive social interactions with coworkers, clients, and other stakeholders inside and outside their company (Muscalu, Todericiu, & Fraticiu, 2013). In addition, companies with high employee engagement and work performance tend to have higher profitability, which increases their ability to financially address social issues such as poverty within their communities (Vyas, 2015; Whyman, Baimbridge, Buraimo, & Petrescu, 2015).

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to identify strategies business leaders use to increase employee engagement and work performance. To study this topic, I needed to understand how employee engagement and disengagement may affect employee performance (Jha & Kumar, 2016). The focus of this research study was employee engagement in a private-sector advertising services company, although reviewing related literature from the private and public sectors provided a broad perspective. The literature review includes three main sections: (a) critical analysis and synthesis of the conceptual framework, (b) critical analysis and synthesis of the literature pertaining to engagement themes, and (c) critical analysis and synthesis of the literature pertaining to disengagement themes. Subtopics include theories supporting the

conceptual framework, theories contradicting the conceptual framework, benefits of employee engagement, negative effects of employee engagement, employee engagement and work performance, and strategies for increasing employee engagement. Other subtopics include degrees of disengagement, causes of employee disengagement, and disadvantages of employee disengagement.

The review of the literature on employee engagement and work performance includes peer-reviewed articles and journals, books, and dissertations. Primary research databases included the ABI/INFORM Collection and Business Source Complete databases available through the Walden University online library. I located peer-reviewed publications to include in this literature review by searching terms such as *engagement*, *employee engagement*, and *engagement theory*, along with related concepts such as *job satisfaction*, *organizational commitment*, *job involvement*, and *work performance*. With regard to employee disengagement, search terms included *disengaged*, *disengagement*, and *employee disengagement*, along with similar phrases such as *employee dissatisfaction* and *employee turnover*. The literature review includes 231 references, 100% of which are peer-reviewed sources, with approximately 88% published between 2015 and 2019.

Critical Analysis and Synthesis of the Conceptual Framework

Qualitative researchers use a conceptual framework for their studies (Beyari & Abareshi, 2016). The conceptual framework for this study was social exchange theory, introduced by Homans (1961), which has become one of the most common theories in the field of business psychology (Boon & Kalshoven, 2014). Ko and Hur (2014) described this theory by explaining that employees typically react positively or negatively

to a company's leaders based on how well leaders treat the employees. For example, employees who have a positive relationship with their leaders tend to respond with a positive attitude toward the workplace, higher commitment to the company's success, and increased work performance (Banihani et al., 2013; Jha & Kumar, 2016; Ko & Hur, 2014; Slack, Corlett, & Morris, 2015). In contrast, employees typically develop a negative attitude toward a company when they feel their leaders do not provide a supportive work environment (Ko & Hur, 2014).

There are two categories related to social exchange theory: leader-member exchange and team-member exchange (Banks et al., 2014). Leader-member exchange refers to relationships between supervisors and their employees, whereas team-member exchange refers to the relationships among coworkers (Banks et al., 2014; Lee & Ok, 2016). Positive relationships in both categories could lead to business successes, such as higher employee performance and job satisfaction (Banks et al., 2014). For example, Kim, Aryee, Loi, and Kim (2013) gathered data from supervisors and employees in a large manufacturing company in South Korea and indicated that high-quality relationships between leaders and employees benefited the company by helping employees feel connected to the organization and dedicated to supporting the company's success.

Theories supporting the conceptual framework. Several employee engagement theories support social exchange theory. According to the conservation of resources theory, employees tend to feel more committed to a company's goals when they receive desired benefits from human resources managers, such as opportunities to develop

professionally (Boon & Kalshoven, 2014). Vroom's expectancy theory similarly indicates that employees who receive positive rewards from company leaders feel motivated to work and perform successfully (Seng, 2016). Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory further supports that leaders who provide employees with a supportive work environment can increase employee satisfaction (Fareed & Jan, 2016; Lacey, Kennett-Hensel, & Manolis, 2015). Similarly, Kahn's (1990) theory of employee engagement indicates that employees usually demonstrate greater commitment to a company when they feel safe at work, have the tools they need to do their jobs, and feel the work they do is meaningful.

Theories contradicting the conceptual framework. Some engagement-related theories contradict social exchange theory. Job burnout theory indicates that employees lack the desire to continue working at an organization when they feel their workload is too heavy or they lack a sense of control at work. Job burnout theory further indicates that employees feel disengaged when they receive no recognition, feel unsupported by their leaders and peers, feel they receive unfair treatment, and feel that the organization's values contradict their personal values (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Other theories also contrast with social exchange theory because their focus is more on how employees' personalities can affect their engagement at work than on how leaders can engage employees. For example, Bandura's social cognitive theory indicates that all employees have personal traits that influence whether they believe they can contribute to a company's success (Zhu, Trevino, & Zheng, 2016). Purposeful work behavior theory similarly has a focus on how employees' traits and the type of work they do can affect

their attitude in the workplace (Hurst, Simon, Jung, & Pirouz, 2017). In addition, the focus of self-determination theory is on the internal and external factors that motivate employees to work hard (Leavell, 2016; Poile, 2017; Shuck, Zigarmi, & Owen, 2015).

Social exchange theory was the best option for the conceptual framework for this study, as it was most aligned with this study's topic. The focus of the theory is how leaders can develop positive relationships with employees (Ko & Hur, 2014), which can encourage employees to respond with higher engagement and work performance (Birtch, Chiang, & Van Esch, 2016; Jha & Kumar, 2016; Karanges et al., 2014). Higher engagement and performance can increase productivity and profitability within organizations (Jha & Kumar, 2016). Social exchange theory themes appear throughout this study.

Critical Analysis and Synthesis of Literature Pertaining to Engagement Themes

Employee engagement has gained increased attention from human resource professionals, business leaders, and academic researchers (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017; Holland, Cooper, & Sheehan, 2017; Kaur, 2017; Shuck, Adelson, & Reio, 2017). The concept of employee engagement first came from Kahn (1990), who explained that engaged employees feel connected to their leaders and peers, work hard each day, and are passionate about achieving company goals. Kahn discovered three conditions necessary for employees to feel engaged. Employees must feel safe at work, have the tools they need to do their jobs, and feel the work they do is meaningful (Francis & Keegan, 2018; Kahn, 1990; Pradhan & Jena, 2016; Wadhwa & Guthrie, 2018). After Kahn introduced the first definition of employee engagement in 1990, other researchers have provided

similar definitions (Godkin, 2015). For example, Banihani et al. (2013) described engagement as an employee's physical and mental commitment to support a company's success. Ganapathy (2016) defined *engaged employees* as workers who have an emotional connection to an organization, love going to work, and develop creative ways to avoid monotony at work. Other researchers have described engaged employees as workers who demonstrate enthusiasm, high energy, teamwork, and focus on work tasks (Byrne, Peters, & Weston, 2016; Jiang et al., 2015; Roof, 2015; Saks & Gruman, 2014; Tillott, Walsh, & Moxham, 2013). Working vigorously, displaying dedication, remaining absorbed, and staying motivated while completing work activities are other phrases researchers have used to describe employee engagement (Delaney & Royal, 2017; Karanika-Murray, Duncan, Pontes, & Griffiths, 2015).

More human resource managers, company executives, and organizational boards of directors are agreeing that engaging employees at work is important to a company's success and competitive advantage (Ababneh & Macky, 2015; Adamski, 2015; Haffer & Haffer, 2015; Javanmard, 2015; Lightle, Castellano, Baker, & Sweeney, 2015; Muduli, Verma, & Datta, 2016; Xie, Shi, & Zhou, 2016). Employees who feel engaged tend to display a stronger commitment to achieving business goals (Prathiba, 2016). To aid business leaders, researchers have conducted a variety of studies on key aspects of engagement, including how engaged employees affect a company's performance and strategies business leaders could use to engage employees (Megha, 2016; Mutsuddi, 2016). The research in this study expands the existing body of knowledge about

employee engagement and work performance and also led to recommendations for business leaders.

Benefits of employee engagement. Employees who are passionate about their work often contribute to a company's growth and competitiveness (Kerns, 2014; van der Walt, 2018). Researchers have identified numerous ways in which a highly engaged workforce can contribute to a company's success. Benefits range from increased performance and productivity to a workforce that can adapt more readily to company changes (Hicks & Knies, 2015).

Increased performance and productivity. Satisfied and engaged workers have higher work performance, have higher productivity, and are less likely to leave their company for other job opportunities (Banihani et al., 2013; Benedetto & Thompson, 2013; Jha & Kumar, 2016; Karanges et al., 2014). Organizations with involved and dedicated employees are 50% more productive than organizations where employees are not as involved (Muscalu et al., 2013). As a result, these organizations tend to have higher operating incomes, experience higher profit growth, and provide higher returns for investors (Kerns, 2014; Kumar & Pansari, 2015).

Higher employee morale and well-being. Other researchers have asserted that feeling engaged at work can enhance a person's sense of health, happiness, safety, security, and comfort (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2016; Jevé, Oppenheimer, & Konje, 2015; Kerns, 2014). Employees who feel happy typically show kindness to one another and work together more effectively, which increases their productivity (Guerci, Radaelli, Siletti, Cirella, & Rami Shani, 2015; Mirabito & Berry, 2015). Happy and empowered

workers are more efficient in accomplishing work tasks (Chambers, 2015). For example, Ivey, Blanc, and Mantler (2015) conducted a study on work engagement and morale in the Canadian Armed Forces and found that an employee who is passionate and committed at work usually has higher self-esteem, higher optimism, and a stronger drive to perform work duties effectively.

Employee innovation. Engaged employees also tend to have a favorable attitude and innovative approach toward their company's products, services, and work processes (Kerns, 2014). Passionate employees can be more creative and more likely to offer new ideas that can benefit an organization like suggestions to save time and money (Aghaz & Tarighian, 2016; Karatepe & Olugbade, 2016; Pater, 2013; Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017). Employees' innovative ideas can help companies decrease costs and streamline services, which can lead to higher profitability (Robinson & Schroeder, 2015).

Employee collaboration. Satisfied and engaged employees also support teamwork within an organization (Benrazavi & Silong, 2013; Drewniak & Karaszewski, 2016; Gupta & Sadrani, 2016; Yoerger, Crowe, & Allen, 2015). For example, Benrazavi and Silong (2013) studied the teamwork concept by conducting a survey with five major Malaysian organizations to examine how employee satisfaction affects employees' willingness to work in teams. The employees' satisfaction toward their work achievements, recognition received, and job responsibilities positively influenced their willingness to work in teams, which is vital to achieving organizational goals (Benrazavi & Silong, 2013).

Lower employee absenteeism. Employee engagement can also reduce the number of employees who are absent from work regularly. Soane et al. (2013) examined this topic by administering questionnaires and studying human resources records to gauge the workplace devotion of 625 employees at a company in the United Kingdom. Soane et al. concluded that employees rarely miss days of work when they believe their job responsibilities are meaningful.

Lower employee turnover. From a broader perspective, employee engagement can also reduce the number of employees who leave a company for other job opportunities (Banihani et al., 2013; Bilal, Shah, Yasir, & Mateen, 2015; Caesens, Stinglhamber, & Marmier, 2016; Ponting, Ponting, & Spilde, 2016; Treuren & Halvorsen, 2016). Employees who feel engaged and empowered are most likely to perceive that they have reasonable workloads, that they receive fair treatment, and that they receive rewards for their contributions (Tillott et al., 2013). Employees who feel this way are less likely to become tired of working for the same company (Tillott et al., 2013), and are more inclined to stay with their organization (Thomas & Pingle, 2017).

Company ambassadorship and customer satisfaction. Engaged employees can be a firm's most credible advocates (Morokane, Chiba, & Kleyn, 2016; Pawar, 2018). When employees feel committed to a company's success, they are more likely to develop strong relationships with customers and to promote the organization in a positive way, which can increase customer satisfaction and loyalty toward the company (MacGillavry & Sinyan, 2016; Myrden & Kelloway, 2015; Popli & Rizvi, 2015). Frontline employees in particular tend to have a significant influence on customers' willingness to purchase a

company's products or services (Kerns, 2014; Muscalu et al., 2013; Sange & Srivastava, 2012).

Adapting to change. Engaged employees are also more likely to support their company during major transitions, such as efforts to reduce spending or to restructure jobs throughout the organization (Kreindler, Larson, Wu, Gbemudu, & Carluzzo, 2014). Because many employees feel intimidated when experiencing major changes at a company, researchers have suggested that company leaders engage employees in decision-making processes during significant changes. Involved employees are less likely to resist the changes, which allows company leaders to implement the transitions more effectively (Hicks & Knies, 2015).

Negative effects of employee engagement. Although most researchers who have studied employee engagement identify the benefits of engaging employees, some researchers have provided negative effects associated with worker engagement. For example, Banihani et al. (2013) suggested that engaged employees might take work projects home, even though completing work projects during personal time can affect employees' work-life balance. Another negative aspect of worker engagement is that leaders sometimes struggle to increase engagement among women in an organization; men often feel engaged at work more quickly than women do, depending on the company (Banihani et al., 2013). For example, at some companies, leaders might have old-fashioned mind-sets that do not support women's advancement into higher positions (Banihani et al., 2013). Women at these companies may feel disrespected and insecure,

which could decrease their willingness to remain passionate and committed to the company's goals.

Employee engagement and work performance. Multiple researchers have acknowledged a link between employee engagement and work performance (Hicks & Knies, 2015; Hough, Green, & Plumlee, 2015; Jha & Kumar, 2016; Kusuma & Madasu, 2015; Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2015). Work performance refers to employees' ability to use their skills to complete their job duties (Qadeer et al., 2016). Manak (2015) further described work performance as the output or result of an employee's efforts.

Engaged employees perform better because they have a positive attitude toward their organization and feel committed to achieving the company's goals (Dutton & Kleiner, 2015; G & Kavitha, 2015; Heymann, 2015; Kim, Nimon, Song, & Zigarmi, 2015; Malhotra, 2016; Medlin, Green, & Wright, 2016; Qadeer et al., 2016). Engaged employees invest more energy, display more enthusiasm, and are more likely to perform duties beyond their normal responsibilities (Qadeer et al., 2016). Qadeer et al. (2016) confirmed the relationship between employee engagement and work performance after conducting a questionnaire-based survey with 210 full-time permanent employees and 27 managers of a large bank in Pakistan.

Breevaart, Bakker, Demerouti, and van den Heuvel (2015) studied the connection between employee engagement and job performance by collecting online questionnaire responses from 847 Dutch police officers. Breevaart et al. learned that leaders who provide employees with benefits such as developmental opportunities and social support tend to have positive relationships with them. These employees tend to respond with

higher engagement and performance (Breevaart et al., 2015). Breevaart et al.'s study reinforced social exchange theory, which indicates that employees who have positive relationships with leaders tend to be more passionate and committed at work (Karanges et al., 2014).

Strategies for increasing employee engagement. Business leaders can increase employee engagement and work performance in multiple ways. However, many leaders lack effective strategies (Benedetto & Thompson, 2013; Yaeger & Sorensen, 2016). Researchers have identified a variety of possible strategies for fostering a positive work culture, since a connection exists between a company's culture and its ability to engage employees (Blattner & Walter, 2015; Hicks & Knies, 2015; Jones, 2015; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2016; Vinodhini & Lakshmi, 2015). A company's culture includes the way that employees, leaders, and work groups behave and interact with each other (Sinha & Sheorey, 2016).

Demonstrating effective leadership. Displaying the right leadership behaviors can help foster a culture in which employees engage (Alimo-Metcalfe, 2018; Howell, 2017; Mohiuddin, 2017; Ong & Yaqiong, 2018; Romans & Tobaben, 2016; Ugaddan & Park, 2017). Leaders should also incorporate employee engagement into their business strategy (Romans & Tobaben, 2016) because engaged workers are often more valuable than other corporate resources (Davis & Simpson, 2017; Wirtz & Jerger, 2016). Companies benefit when leaders view worker engagement as more than a task to complete (Pankajakshan, Thakkar, Bhat, & Aditya, 2016; Romans & Tobaben, 2016).

Various leadership styles can foster employee engagement, including vulnerable and soft leadership (Jiang & Men, 2017; Mozammel & Haan, 2016; Ng, 2017; Rao, 2016; Sheth, 2016; Wahid & Mohd, 2017; Walters & Diab, 2016). Rao (2016) identified 11 key factors that define soft leadership: character, charisma, conscience, conviction, courage, communication, compassion, commitment, consistency, consideration, and contribution.

Humble leaders also help to engage employees (Walter & Diab, 2016). Walters and Diab (2016) collected data from 140 workers and indicated that leaders who acknowledge personal limitations and recognize employees' strengths can create an environment where employees engage. Jiang and Men (2017) similarly indicated that authentic leaders can increase engagement. Spiritual leadership was an area of focus for Wahid and Mohd (2017), who administered a questionnaire to 140 employees in Malaysia's telecommunications industry. Spiritual leaders can help increase worker engagement because they acknowledge the importance of human values, believe that each employee's life has meaning, and remind employees of their influence (Wahid & Mohd, 2017).

Transformational leadership can also influence worker engagement and job performance (Dash & Muthyala, 2016; Malik, Javed, & Hassan, 2017; Mozammel & Haan, 2016; Ng, 2017; Schmitt, Den Hartog, & Belschak, 2016; Zaeck & Baldegger, 2017). Transformational leaders inspire employees, often by introducing new perspectives on organizational challenges (Khan & Ismail, 2017; Lal, 2016; Mozammel & Haan, 2016; Pasha, Poister, Wright, & Thomas, 2017). Mozammel and Haan (2016) administered an online questionnaire about transformational leadership to 128 banking

sector employees in Bangladesh and concluded that a transformational leadership style contributes to higher engagement among employees.

Hiring high-quality employees. Hiring effective employees can also enhance worker engagement and performance. Companies whose leaders are strategic about getting the right talent to the right place and at the right time are more likely to remain competitive (Herbert, 2016). Leaders must especially consider employees' personalities when making hiring decisions (Tladinyane & van der Merwe, 2016; Unal & Turgut, 2015). Some company leaders give job candidates an opportunity to observe current employees so candidates can determine if their personality would be a good fit for the company (Wells & Bravender, 2016). Many leaders also invite current employees to help interview job candidates to determine who might integrate well (Zwillinger, 2017).

In addition to hiring qualified employees, leaders must engage newly hired employees early in their tenure. Keisling and Laning (2016) conducted interviews with 20 new academic librarians to discuss their onboarding experiences. Keisling and Laning learned that leaders who highlight expectations, discuss organizational tools, and provide new employees with opportunities to build relationships companywide can help new employees feel engaged.

Rewarding high-performing employees. Employees also feel more engaged when they receive benefits for working hard (Chapman, Sisk, Schatten, & Miles, 2018). Financial rewards can motivate employees, based on questionnaire responses that Farndale and Murrer (2015) collected from 19,260 employees of a large multinational financial services corporation in Mexico, the Netherlands, and the United States.

Companies benefit when leaders understand employees' needs and use this information to create a compelling package of employee rewards (Fisher, 2017; Ghose & Mohanty, 2016; Lardner, 2015). Leaders who reward and show appreciation to employees can increase employees' sense of accomplishment and encourage them to remain committed to the company's goals (Rana, 2015; Sugandini, El Qadri, Kustiyadi, & Muafi, 2018; White, 2016, 2017).

Promoting learning and development programs. Offering educational and development programs can also contribute to higher engagement and work performance because it shows leaders' commitment to employee growth (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016; Gupta, 2015; Peterson, 2015; Presbitero, 2017; Raina & Kalse, 2018; Shah & Gupta, 2018). Izzard-Carroll (2016) identified employee development as a key strategy that seven public sector leaders used to improve employee retention. Organizational mentoring programs exemplify an employee development resource (Anaza, Nowlin, & Wu, 2016; Welsh & Dixon, 2016). Sange and Srivastava (2012) surveyed 170 sales and marketing professionals from the Mumbai region of India and learned that employees who had a mentor or mentee felt more connected and committed to their company.

Providing adequate resources and autonomy. Having the right tools, training, and supervisor support similarly helps engage employees (Jin & McDonald, 2017; Rana, 2015; Tadic, Bakker, & Oerlemans, 2015). Employees also feel more engaged when they have the flexibility and permission to make their own decisions on work projects (Bal & De Lange, 2015; Bhuvanaiah & Raya, 2015; Jose & Mampilly, 2015; Rana, 2015). Empowered employees believe in their ability to do their job and influence their work

department (Rantika & Yustina, 2017; Yelamanchili, 2018), whereas micromanaged employees tend to have lower engagement (Hassell, 2018).

Promoting company values. Leaders can engage employees by recognizing and rewarding them for demonstrating the company's core values (Benedetto & Thompson, 2013). Company values refer to the behaviors that define a company's identity (Benedetto & Thompson, 2013). Employees are more likely to feel committed to a company when they know leaders are serious about promoting and rewarding values such as safety, honesty, empathy, compassion, and community volunteerism (Benedetto & Thompson, 2013; Dhugga, 2016; Friedman & Gerstein, 2017). In particular, encouraging employees to volunteer in the community on their company's behalf helps increase their sense of connection to the organization (Plewa, Conduit, Quester, & Johnson, 2015).

Emphasizing inclusion. Other strategies to engage employees include promoting a diverse workforce where all employees feel they belong, and giving them the opportunity to contribute to the firm's success (Downey, Werff, Thomas, & Plaut, 2015; Frenking, 2016; Silverman, 2017). Leaders must leverage each employee's strengths (Helbling, 2018) and encourage workers to share ideas during meetings (Tillott et al., 2013). In addition, employees feel more engaged when leaders invite them to help make decisions about their team's work (Tillott et al., 2013).

Fostering positive peer relationships. Leaders can further engage workers by using team-building, social, and corporate sports activities to foster positive peer relationships (Becker & Tews, 2016; Krishnaveni & Monica, 2016; Kumar & Raghavendran, 2015; Paton, 2016; Plester & Hutchison, 2016). Matei and Abrudan

(2015) facilitated two focus groups with 10 participants from different generations and revealed that peer relationships within the groups affected their level of satisfaction. That revelation aligns with social exchange theory by demonstrating how employees who have positive relationships with coworkers tend to have higher engagement (Jha & Kumar, 2016). Managing conflict among employees and promoting emotional connectedness can also increase employee performance, innovation, and loyalty (Kumar & Raghavendran, 2015; Reade & Lee, 2016).

Promoting trust. Employees appreciate working in an environment where their coworkers and executive managers are trustworthy, make ethical decisions, act reliably, and demonstrate honesty (Backhaus & Sleeth, 2016; Ciocirlan, 2017; Hough et al., 2015; Lam, Loi, Chan, & Liu, 2016; Srivastava, 2016). One way to foster a trusting environment is to treat employees fairly (Conkright, 2015). For example, leaders should provide rewards and benefits to all employees who have earned them, rather than rewarding only their favorite workers (Rasheed, Khan, & Ramzan, 2013).

Supporting work–life balance. Employees tend to feel more invested at work when their leaders show they care about employees' health, well-being, and interests (Rasheed et al., 2013). Leaders can demonstrate this kind of care by emphasizing work–life balance and supporting flexible schedules as more employees struggle to balance their work and family-related responsibilities (Antony, 2018; Garg, 2015; Kaliannan, Perumal, & Dorasamy, 2016; Mahal, 2018; Odle-Dusseau, Hammer, Crain, & Bodner, 2016; Oludayo, Falola, Obianuju, & Demilade, 2018; Sterling, 2016). This struggle is often intense in families where multiple parties have a full-time job (Garg, 2015).

Derks, Duin, Tims, and Bakker (2015) conducted a 4-day quantitative diary study with 100 employees and learned that supervisors should clearly define their expectations regarding employees' use of company smartphones during personal hours. Specifically, supervisors should not expect employees to answer all phone calls and e-mails and should not interfere with their family time (Derks et al., 2015). Masuda, Holtschlag, and Nicklin (2017) studied work–life balance by examining the effects of telecommuting on employee engagement. After conducting a three-phase study over 10 months, Masuda et al. concluded that giving employees the option to work from home could strengthen employee engagement and commitment.

Communicating effectively with employees. Business leaders can use effective internal marketing and communication strategies to engage employees (Eaglebarger, 2017; Goncalves, 2017; Kang & Sung, 2017; Sterling, 2017). Many theorists endorse corporate storytelling as a valuable medium for engaging with employees and improving a firm's internal reputation (Gill, 2015). This internal storytelling strategy can especially increase employee commitment toward company initiatives, including sustainability programs focused on environmental efforts (Santhosh & Baral, 2016).

Other researchers further emphasized the value of using internal communication to engage workers (Karanges et al., 2014; Korzynski, 2015; Nadim, 2015). Muscalu et al. (2013) noted that more than 80% of employees who completed surveys in the United States and Great Britain confirmed that internal communication influences their decision to stay with their company. Part of leaders' ability to communicate effectively means

clearly explaining their expectations to employees on a regular basis (Tillott et al., 2013; Tucker, 2017).

Leaders who communicate company information, business goals, and processes can also help employees feel a stronger sense of ownership for their duties (DeAscentis, 2016; Ergle, 2015). Clearly communicating the reasons behind company decisions can similarly engage workers by increasing their understanding and support of the decisions (Lavigna, 2015). In addition, leaders who frequently provide feedback to employees regarding their performance can strengthen workers' sense of commitment to organizational goals (Heller, 2017; Kurra & Barnett, 2016; Spigener, 2017). Leaders should also foster ongoing dialogue among team members (Seymour & Geldenhuys, 2018) and emphasize to employees that their work is important to the company's success (Carton, Murphy, & Clark, 2014).

Carton et al. (2014) further emphasized the need for effective communication after conducting an archival study of 151 hospitals and an experiment with 62 groups of full-time employees. Carton et al. uncovered two common, ineffective communication practices. The first practice is the tendency for business leaders to communicate unclear or inconsistent visions for the company (Carton et al., 2014). The second is the tendency for leaders to communicate an overwhelming number of company values rather than a small number of explicitly stated values (Carton et al., 2014). Carton et al. noted that leaders who avoid both practices could engage employees, create unity among workers, and increase organizational performance.

Karanges et al. (2014) studied the communication—employee engagement connection by collecting online survey data from 200 nonexecutive employees, and concluded that managers should communicate in a way that employees feel supported and appreciated. Face-to-face communication serves as an effective approach (O’Neill, Hodgson, & Mazrouei, 2015). O’Neill et al. (2015) conducted interviews with 16 Emirati employees in the United Arab Emirates and learned that participants felt most engaged when leaders and peers used face-to-face communication. Men and Hung-Baesecke (2015) reinforced that face-to-face interactions and social media were effective channels for building organizational transparency and engaging employees, based on a web survey of 407 workers in medium-sized and large corporations in China. Parks (2015) surveyed 50 years of organizational communication research and suggested that leaders who listen to their employees with compassion and respect can increase employees’ commitment at work. Schramm (2017) likewise recommended that leaders genuinely listen to employees to engage their workforce and enhance the quality of the work environment.

Critical Analysis and Synthesis of Literature Pertaining to Disengagement Themes

Employee disengagement refers to employees’ lack of personal fulfillment at work (Kahn, 1990). Disengaged employees have little desire to work hard to help their company succeed (Banihani et al., 2013; Kahn, 1990; Keating & Heslin, 2015). Lack of dedication often leads to low work performance (Jha & Kumar, 2016).

Disengaged employees usually display several warning signs, such as not asking important questions or thinking carefully about work tasks (Pater, 2013). In addition, they often ignore deadlines and might spend time at work using social media sites for personal

reasons (Pater, 2013). Disengaged workers fail to offer innovative or creative ideas, tend not to participate in meetings, and do not want to cooperate with coworkers from other departments (Pater, 2013). They might even skip work regularly (Boichuk & Menguc, 2013).

Degrees of disengagement. Two types of disengaged employees include passively withdrawn employees and actively resistant employees (Pater & Lewis, 2012). Pater and Lewis (2012) provided examples of both types, with a specific focus on employees' attitudes toward company safety practices. For example, passively withdrawn employees tend not to focus on safety policies or training methods, fail to discuss safety concerns, and often decline the opportunity to serve on safety committees (Pater & Lewis, 2012). Actively resistant employees might display even more extreme levels of disengagement, such as making jokes during safety meetings or distracting leaders from sharing important safety advice (Pater & Lewis, 2012).

Causes of employee disengagement. Some employees might engage at work initially (Kerns, 2014). However, the same employees might feel disengaged over time (Kerns, 2014). Business leaders benefit from understanding why this gradual shift sometimes occurs within organizations (Kerns, 2014; Rao, 2017).

Negative interactions with customers and leaders. Some employees disengage after interacting with angry, intimidating, and unfriendly customers (Goussinsky, 2012). Other employees might lose passion at work because they have a negative experience with company leaders. For example, some employees work for managers who are territorial or intimidating (Dye, 2018). In some firms, managers believe increasing

employee engagement is impossible and not worth trying, which can upset employees (Pater & Lewis, 2012).

Some workers disengage because they feel that leaders take them for granted or do not fulfill their promises to employees (Pater & Lewis, 2012). Other workers do not believe their leaders are honest and caring, which discourages them from wanting to contribute to the organization's success (Pater & Lewis, 2012). Employees sometimes disengage because their leaders do not communicate or interact with them respectfully (Singh, 2013). Singh (2013) surveyed 474 employees and learned that employees felt more satisfied when their leaders were trustworthy; compassionate; and effective at communicating, building relationships, and addressing conflicts.

Lack of resources, autonomy, or compensation. Some workers feel uncommitted because they feel they do not have the equipment and supplies they need to do their jobs (Fida et al., 2014). Other workers might disengage after feeling overwhelmed with the number of tasks they must complete with inadequate support (Fida et al., 2014). Some employees feel upset because they do not have the freedom to make their own decisions about work projects (Fida et al., 2014). Compensation and workplace policies represent other sources of frustration for some employees (Matei & Abrudan, 2015).

Low self-esteem. Some employees disengage at work because they do not feel confident about their own skills (Consiglio, Borgogni, Di Tecco, & Schaufeli, 2016; Ngo, Liu, & Cheung, 2017; Pater & Lewis, 2012). Liu, Cho, and Putra (2017) studied this concept by conducting a survey study of 149 restaurant employees. Liu et al. confirmed that employees who lack self-esteem could have a negative attitude toward their jobs.

Employee dissension. Disengagement can also be common among employees who do not get along with each other (Magee, Gordon, Robinson, Caputi, & Oades, 2017). Workplaces where employees gossip and communicate false rumors about each other usually have high levels of employee disengagement and anxiety (Vroegindewey, 2015). Wu, Kwan, Wu, and Ma (2018) confirmed this trend after studying 234 supervisor–subordinate relationships in China and learning that employees who worked in an environment with gossip tended to display less proactiveness. Employees also tend to have lower engagement when they work in an environment where colleagues and leaders are quick to blame each other upon encountering challenges (Hsu, Ware, & Heisinger, 2015; Skarlicki, Kay, Aquino, & Fushtey, 2017).

Disadvantages of employee disengagement. Disengaged employees can affect an organization (Miller & Hill, 2017). Researchers have identified several disadvantages of employee disengagement (Kerns, 2014). Consequences range from lower customer satisfaction to lower profitability (Goussinsky, 2012; Liu & Berry, 2013).

Decreased customer satisfaction. Disengaged employees can ruin a customer's experience (Cava & Fernandez, 2017; Goussinsky, 2012). For example, if a frontline employee becomes angry after interacting with unfriendly customers, the employee might take frequent breaks to avoid working with additional customers (Goussinsky, 2012). Customers might become frustrated at the lack of service (Goussinsky, 2012).

Loss of profitability and productivity. Companies often experience lower profitability due to the lagging productivity levels of unhappy employees (Adarsh & Roopesh, 2017; A. Manning, 2016). Organizations lose an average of \$1,000 in profit

each year for every employee who feels disengaged and uncommitted to the company's success (Jha & Kumar, 2016). Unmotivated employees might even discourage colleagues from focusing on company goals, which could cost organizations as much as \$300 billion in lost productivity annually (Banihani et al., 2013; Pater & Lewis, 2012). Productivity levels also decrease when dissatisfied employees fail to share new ideas (Boichuk & Menguc, 2013), or when they leave the company for other opportunities (Kerns, 2014). Hiring and training new employees cost organizations time and money (Yalabik, van Rossenberg, Kinnie, & Swart, 2015).

Employee health issues. Employees who lack the desire to work hard are also likely to experience mental and physical health problems (Aazami, Shamsuddin, Akmal, & Azami, 2015; Nicholson & Griffin, 2015). Many disengaged employees feel angry, frustrated, depressed, anxious, and stressed, all of which can damage employees' health and quality of life (Fida et al., 2014). Nicholson and Griffin (2015) provided surveys to 175 employees in the legal industry and learned that employees who felt they had rude colleagues often had negative attitudes at the end of the workday. Employees who lack a sense of connection to company values are also likely to feel disengaged and experience physical and mental burnout (Peoples, 2016).

Unethical behavior. Employees who lack a sense of commitment might also feel tempted to act unethically by leaving work early, taking unauthorized breaks, loitering, or abusing sick leave (Liu & Berry, 2013). Some employees act this way because they believe company leaders have treated them unfairly, such as giving higher pay, greater rewards, and more promotions to certain employees (Liu & Berry, 2013). Disengaged

employees might even become frustrated to the point of stealing equipment and materials from their company (Shoss, Jundt, Kobler, & Reynolds, 2016).

Employee disengagement can lead to other types of dangerous behavior as well. For example, disengaged employees could demonstrate aggression by blaming others and encouraging conflict and violence at work, which can cause many employees to feel unhappy and unsafe (Tillott et al., 2013). Some disengaged workers might even complete tasks incorrectly on purpose, or try to embarrass coworkers by insulting their work performance (Fida et al., 2014).

Relationship of the Study to Previous Research and Findings

Many researchers in the reviewed literature conducted quantitative studies to examine employee engagement and work performance. I selected the qualitative methodology for this study so that I could conduct exploratory research to help expand the existing body of knowledge on these topics. Qualitative research was also the most appropriate method for answering this study's research question. In quantitative studies, researchers typically use closed-ended questions to examine the relationships between variables (Venkatesh et al., 2013). As the focus of this study was an open-ended research question, a qualitative investigation was more suitable.

This study includes noteworthy recommendations from similar research conducted in 2016. For example, Izard-Carroll (2016) explored strategies that public sector leaders in western New York implemented to improve employee retention. Izard-Carroll suggested that future researchers conduct a similar study with new participants in a different geographic area. Walker (2016) explored strategies that engineering managers

in Connecticut used to increase employee engagement, and suggested researchers conduct a related study at an organization outside of Connecticut. Research for this case study took place in Indiana to provide new findings on the strategies business leaders use to increase employee engagement and work performance.

The objective was to identify strategies that could help business leaders who struggle to engage their workforce and enhance employee performance. Themes identified during the case study research were compared with the employee engagement themes discussed in the literature review, including demonstrating effective leadership, hiring high-quality employees, rewarding high-performing employees, and promoting learning and development programs. Other engagement themes discussed in the literature review included providing adequate resources and autonomy, promoting company values, emphasizing inclusion, fostering positive peer relationships, promoting trust, supporting work–life balance, and communicating effectively with employees. Reviewing interview transcripts from this case study provided an opportunity to compare and contrast the interview data with the key engagement themes from the literature review. New strategies uncovered during the case study data analysis became search terms for additional literature related to employee engagement and work performance. Thus, updating the literature review remained an ongoing process throughout this study.

Transition and Summary

Section 1 included the background of the problem, problem statement, purpose statement, and nature of the study. The section also included the research and interview questions, conceptual framework, operational definitions, assumptions, limitations,

delimitations, and significance of the study. Section 1 concluded with a review of the professional and academic literature.

Section 2 includes the following sections: purpose statement, role of the researcher, participants, research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments, data collection technique, data organization technique, data analysis, and reliability and validity. Section 3 includes an overview of the study, a presentation of the findings, applications to professional practice, implications for social change, and recommendations for action and further study. The section concludes with researcher reflections.

Section 2: The Project

Section 2 includes the purpose and the research process for this case study. In this study, the intent was to interview company leaders and review company documents to identify strategies business leaders use to increase employee engagement and work performance. Section 2 consists of the study's purpose, role of the researcher, participants, research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments, data collection technique, data organization technique, data analysis, and reliability and validity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies that business leaders in the service industry use to increase employee engagement and work performance. The targeted population consisted of six leaders at an advertising services company headquartered in Indiana who successfully developed and implemented strategies that helped increase employee engagement levels. This study has implications for positive social change because company leaders who have engaged and high-performing employees tend to be more profitable, which can help financially address social issues such as poverty in communities.

Role of the Researcher

Qualitative researchers do not use formal instruments such as surveys to collect data (Bailey, 2014). Instead, they adopt the role of the data collection instrument by conducting interviews with study participants (Barnham, 2015). I adopted this role as I interviewed leaders at an advertising services company headquartered in Indiana.

I have relevant experience related to employee engagement; while working for 7 years in corporate communications for a utility, I participated in several company culture initiatives. For example, I served on culture committees and facilitated workshops on engaging employees and improving the work environment. I also have experience in organizational development, including supporting employee engagement and development programs. My connection to the service industry and the advertising industry stems from a professional relationship I developed in 2009 with a vice president for an advertising services company in Indiana. I collaborated with that leader to identify and connect with additional leaders at the company who were eligible to participate in this study. Additionally, the county in Indiana where the company is located is only 3 hours from my place of residence and was thus a convenient location for conducting research.

While conducting research for this study, I followed Belmont Report procedures (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1979). The report is a guide for conducting research on humans ethically (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1979). I also communicated with prospective study participants about the purpose of my research and my research process. Communicating the purpose of a research study can help prospective participants make an informed decision about whether to participate (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1979).

In addition, bias mitigation was important throughout the research process. Researchers tend to have personal biases or previous experiences that can influence how they interpret data (Shepperd, 2015; Winston, 2015). One way to mitigate bias is to avoid

backyard research, which refers to someone studying his or her own company (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Thus, I did not investigate my place of employment for this study.

Another way to mitigate bias is to conduct member checking of participants' interview data (Simpson & Quigley, 2016). I used member checking by writing my interpretations of the interviewees' responses and then verifying with the participants that my interpretations were accurate. These types of strategies help preserve qualitative validity, which refers to a study's trustworthiness and accuracy (Ali & Yusof, 2011).

As part of this case study, I conducted one-on-one interviews with participants. Researchers who conduct interviews often gather in-depth personal information and perspectives related to a phenomenon (Venkatesh et al., 2013). I also have extensive experience conducting interviews from working as a business newspaper journalist for 3 years, which required asking open-ended questions, transcribing notes, and analyzing the information I gathered. This experience prepared me for the qualitative interviews I conducted during this case study.

I provided all study participants with a semistructured interview protocol and open-ended interview questions (see Appendix). Interview protocols serve as detailed guidelines for the interview process (Bozer, Levin, & Santora, 2017). Researchers use interview protocols to provide a consistent approach for gathering interview responses from each participant (Bong & Cho, 2017). In addition to conducting interviews, I reviewed company documents.

Participants

Participants had to meet two eligibility criteria. First, all interviewees needed to serve in a leadership role in a service company. Second, participants needed to have experience with the phenomenon. Identifying participants who have experience with the phenomenon is a research standard for case studies (Yin, 2014). Thus, the selected participants for this study included leaders who worked for a service company and who had developed successful strategies for increasing employee engagement and work performance. These criteria for study participants aligned with the study's central research question: What strategies do business leaders in the service industry use to increase employee engagement and work performance? Interviewing leaders at an advertising services company regarding their strategies for increasing employee engagement and work performance satisfied the focus of the research question.

I gained access to study participants by leveraging my professional network. I met a vice president of the case study organization in 2009. Since then, I maintained occasional e-mail and face-to-face communication with this vice president, especially after learning the company had received local recognition for its positive company culture. This vice president was able to provide the names and contact information for all leaders at the company who were eligible to participate in this case study. I then extended individual invitations to leaders to determine the level of interest in participating. Thus, I used a sampling frame, identifying participants who represent a company's larger population (see Kellmeyer, 2015). The reason for targeting six leaders for this case study was that previous research has shown data saturation with a sample size of six company

leaders (see Walker, 2016). Data saturation refers to the point at which a researcher has gathered sufficient information and will not identify new information or themes upon conducting additional interviews (Coenen, Stamm, Stucki, & Cieza, 2012).

Research Method and Design

Research Method

Researchers can select from among three research methods: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed. Quantitative researchers use experimental testing and statistical analysis (Venkatesh et al., 2013). Qualitative researchers use interviews and observations to study topics from an exploratory perspective (Bailey, 2014; Kellmerit, 2015). Mixed methods researchers combine quantitative and qualitative research (Venkatesh et al., 2013).

The qualitative method was most suitable for this study because qualitative researchers use open-ended questions to study a topic. The focus of this study was the following open-ended question: What strategies do business leaders in the service industry use to increase employee engagement and work performance? In addition, qualitative researchers can collect and interpret data from study participants at their place of employment (Bailey, 2014; Kellmerit, 2015; Yap & Webber, 2015), and conducting field research within an organization was a goal of this case study.

The quantitative method was not appropriate for the study. Quantitative researchers use statistics to examine and analyze the relationship between two or more variables (Apuke, 2017; Kellmerit, 2015; Pozniak, 2015; Venkatesh et al., 2013). Statistical analysis was not the goal of this study, as the objective was to explore the

strategies company leaders use to engage employees. Mixed methods research was also inappropriate for this study because mixed methods researchers combine qualitative and quantitative research (Fàbregues & Molina-Azorín, 2017; Guetterman, 2017; Venkatesh et al., 2013). Combining exploratory and statistical research was not the objective of this study.

Research Design

Qualitative researchers can choose among several research design options, including phenomenology, case study, narrative study, and ethnography. A qualitative single case study was most appropriate for this study. Case studies have become increasingly popular for investigating real-life phenomena in depth (Ridder, 2017). Case study researchers study one or more events, organizations, activities, or processes to gather insights related to a phenomenon (Yin, 2012). Researchers generally conduct a case study in a specific location and over a specific time frame (Yin, 2012). In addition, case study researchers gather data from multiple sources to enhance a study's validity (Cunningham, Menter, & Young, 2017; Yin, 2012). Data can be collected from interviews, participant observations, site visits, documentation, archival records, and physical artifacts (Yin, 2014). I interviewed company leaders about the strategies they used to increase employee engagement and work performance, and I reviewed company documents to gain extra insight into the research question.

A narrative and ethnographic design were both unsuitable for this study. Narrative researchers explore individuals' experiences by asking one or more people to share personal life stories (Kourti, 2016). Researchers commonly use narrative research (Bouza

Garcia, 2017; Julkunen, 2016). However, this approach was not suitable for this study because the focus was not on an individual's personal life. Additionally, ethnographic researchers study phenomena by gaining access to environments where they can observe participants in their natural setting and learn more about their culture (Giazitzoglu & Payne, 2018). Ethnographic researchers typically conduct interviews and observations of a group of people over an extended period (Cincotta, 2015). For example, J. Manning (2016) spent 3 months researching practices of marginalized Mayan women's cooperative groups in Guatemala. The ethnographic approach was not suitable for this study, as not enough time was available to study a company over a prolonged period.

Phenomenology was also not chosen as the design for this study. Phenomenology researchers can conduct interviews with a small number of study participants to understand their lived experiences related to a particular phenomenon (Kaszynska, 2015). For example, Puyou and Fay (2015) used phenomenology to study ethical work for financial controllers. In addition, Sibanda and Ramrathan (2017) used phenomenology to explore the influence of information technology on organizational strategy. However, this design was not appropriate for this study, as the purpose of the study was to explore company leaders' engagement strategies and not their lived experiences.

In addition to selecting an appropriate research design, researchers also must achieve data saturation. Data saturation is the point in the data collection process whereby a researcher has gathered sufficient information from the field and identifies no new information or themes (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). Data saturation is important because researchers should not draw conclusions from small samples

(McQuarrie & McIntyre, 2014). To achieve data saturation in a case study, some methodologists recommend conducting three to five interviews, whereas others suggest having six sources of evidence (Marshall et al., 2013). I interviewed six participants for this study because researchers of similar studies also interviewed six participants. For example, Walker (2016) interviewed six managers as part of a qualitative single case study on strategies that business leaders of a service organization used to increase employee engagement. I interviewed six leaders from an advertising services company regarding what strategies they used to increase employee engagement and work performance.

Population and Sampling

The population for this qualitative single case study included leaders of an advertising services company headquartered in Indiana. I selected the participants through purposeful sampling. Researchers who use purposeful sampling select participants based on who can answer the research question most effectively (Karanja, 2017; see also Abrahams, 2017; Dwomoh, Kwarteng, Frempong, & Frempong, 2015). I used purposeful sampling to identify a suitable company to research and the company leaders who could answer the research question most effectively. The primary criteria for participants included (a) serving as a leader at the case study organization and (b) having responsibility for developing and implementing employee engagement strategies. These requirements satisfied the study's focus on business leaders who could discuss their strategies for increasing employee engagement and work performance. I conducted the one-on-one interviews inside a neutral environment (a closed-door company conference

room). Thus, study participants were able to speak openly and candidly about the research question for this study. It is important to identify and prepare interview settings where study participants can speak most comfortably (Tortorella, Viana, & Fettermann, 2015).

The sample size for this study consisted of six company leaders. I selected this sample size for two reasons. First, previous research has shown success with six company leaders (see Walker, 2016). Second, I needed to choose an appropriate number of interviewees for data saturation. Data saturation refers to the point where no new themes emerge from interviews (Coenen et al., 2012). I achieved data saturation after the fourth interview for this study, as the fifth and sixth interviewees repeated key information collected during the first four interviews.

After completing the interviews at the case study organization, I conducted member checking (see Appendix) to further ensure data saturation occurred and to confirm the accuracy of the interview data. Member checking means following up with study participants to validate researcher interpretations of the interview data and to gather additional insights (Li, Westbrook, Callen, Georgiou, & Braithwaite, 2013; Roth, Theriault, Clement, & Worthington, 2016; Simpson & Quigley, 2016). Conducting this process involved writing each interview question and then writing a one-paragraph interpretation of interviewees' responses. Study participants then had an opportunity to review and confirm the interpretations.

Ethical Research

Maintaining ethics throughout the research process is emphasized in research institutions (Greenwood, 2016). One way I adhered to ethical procedures for this study was to delay any data collection until the Walden University Institutional Review Board provided permission to conduct the study (approval no. 06-01-18-0497897). After the Institutional Review Board granted permission to proceed with the study, I informed all study participants about the research procedures. Informing potential study participants about research procedures can help them make an informed decision about participating in a study (Litwin, 2016; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1979). All potential participants for this study had to be at least 18 years old and received an e-mailed informed consent document prior to participating in interviews. Electronic informed consent forms have become increasingly prevalent in research studies (Coughlin, 2015). The consent document included a written explanation of the study's purpose, strategies for ensuring participant privacy, and notification that I would record all interviews. In addition, the consent form indicated that participants would receive no compensation for participating in the study and had the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time by contacting me via phone or e-mail.

I followed other ethical procedures to protect the privacy of the case study organization and the names of the study participants. Participant anonymity and data confidentiality are ethical concerns during the research process (Farooq & de Villiers, 2017). Thus, I removed specific references to names, demographics, or other identifiable information from the case study data. In addition, all consent forms and case study data

will remain on an external hard drive and in a fireproof home office safe for 5 years.

After 5 years, I will delete all materials permanently.

Data Collection Instruments

Quantitative researchers use formal instruments such as surveys to collect data (Bailey, 2014; Venkatesh et al., 2013). However, qualitative researchers serve as the primary data collection instruments by conducting interviews and observations with study participants (Barnham, 2015). I collected data from semistructured interviews and company documents.

The semistructured interviews took place with six leaders of an advertising services company. Each leader had responsibility for developing and implementing employee engagement strategies. I used a semistructured interview protocol and a set of preplanned interview questions for each study participant (see Appendix). Multiple researchers have used semistructured interviews to explore business topics. For example, Turner and Endres (2017) conducted semistructured interviews with three small-business coffee shop owners to study strategies that small-business owners can use to succeed beyond 5 years. Shortland (2016) used semistructured interviews to investigate why women accept international assignments as expatriates. Ballaro and Polk (2017) also used semistructured interviews to study the role of a human resources department in developing and communicating an effective succession plan.

I also reviewed company documents. Many researchers have combined document analysis with other data collection methods to study a topic (Virakul & McLean, 2012). For example, Ruiz and Davis (2017) analyzed documents while exploring strategies to

retain millennial employees at full-service restaurants. Rodreck (2017) also used document analysis to explore auditing and accountability in financial management in Zimbabwean government entities.

I used several strategies to enhance the reliability and validity of the data collection process. Qualitative reliability refers to ensuring consistency during data collection (Ali & Yusof, 2011). One way to achieve reliability is to develop structured protocols for asking questions and recording answers during case study interviews (Bong & Cho, 2017). I used a semistructured interview protocol including preplanned interview questions for each study participant (see Appendix). Another strategy to ensure reliability is to review interview transcripts carefully and to apply any codes to the data consistently (Azevedo et al., 2017). I adopted this strategy for the study.

Qualitative validity means ensuring the accuracy of a study's findings (Ali & Yusof, 2011). I ensured validity by collecting data from two sources: semistructured interviews and company documents. Collecting data from multiple sources helps researchers confirm recurring themes (Yin, 2012). Another strategy I used to preserve validity was member checking. Member checking involves verifying a researcher's data interpretations with study participants to ensure the interpretations reflect what the participants wanted to communicate (Simpson & Quigley, 2016).

Data Collection Technique

Case study researchers should use at least two data collection techniques to study a phenomenon (Krichanchai & MacCarthy, 2017). I used semistructured interviews and company documents. Semistructured interviews took place with six company leaders

responsible for developing and implementing employee engagement strategies. The leaders discussed the strategies they have developed and implemented company-wide to increase employee engagement and work performance.

Prior to the interviews, I asked the company leaders to complete and return an informed consent form via e-mail. Participants received a reminder e-mail a couple of days before their interviews and a final reminder e-mail the morning of the interview. I conducted the semistructured interviews in a closed-door conference room following a series of steps outlined in a semistructured interview protocol (see Appendix). For example, I began the interview by introducing myself and reminding participants of the purpose of the study. I showed participants their signed consent form and asked if they had any questions or concerns about what they signed. I then turned on the audio recorder, pushed the record button, and introduced the participant using an alias to protect the participant's privacy. I stated the month, day, year, and time.

Afterward, I asked the interview questions from the semistructured interview protocol (see Appendix) and followed up with additional questions as needed. After expressing thanks for participating in the interview, I reminded the participant to contact me with any additional questions. Finally, I discussed my plan to conduct a transcript review and a member-checking follow-up interview with the participant.

A benefit of conducting semistructured interviews as a data collection technique is that researchers can use interviews to gather in-depth information about a phenomenon, particularly from subject matter experts (Mojtahed, Nunes, Martins, & Peng, 2014). However, a common drawback of conducting interviews is that researchers sometimes

struggle to gain access to companies, particularly in international settings (Fjellström & Guttormsen, 2016). In addition, conducting one-on-one interviews with participants does not provide the engaging interactions that tend to occur during group interviews (O'Neill, 2012). Another drawback is that even experienced researchers sometimes struggle to advance the conversation during an interview (Mojtahed et al., 2014). I did not need to conduct a pilot study for this case study after Institutional Review Board approval. Pilot studies are necessary only for complex case studies (Yin, 2014).

My second data collection technique consisted of reviewing relevant company documents. I accessed these documents by asking each of the interviewees to suggest or provide materials worth analyzing, such as materials on the company's website and social media sites. A general advantage of this technique is that researchers who review company documents tend to have a more thorough understanding of the research topic (Virakul & McLean, 2012). Depending on the topic, company leaders can provide researchers with access to a variety of documents ranging from financial statements to codes of conduct (Wilkins, Colvard, & Lipinski, 2014). For example, Warren and Szostek (2017) analyzed financial documents to study strategies for helping small-business owners sustain their operations beyond 10 years. One drawback of reviewing company documents is that some researchers struggle to gain access to organizational data (Fjellström & Guttormsen, 2016).

After collecting data, I conducted transcript reviews and member checking of the data interpretations. Researchers conduct transcript reviews and member checking to ensure the reliability and validity of their data (Ali & Yusof, 2011; Roth et al., 2016;

Simpson & Quigley, 2016). Company leaders who participated in the semistructured interviews first received transcripts to review for accuracy. I then analyzed all transcripts to interpret what the study participants communicated. This process included writing each interview question and providing a one-paragraph summary of my interpretations. I shared my interpretations with study participants during follow-up interviews so they could verify the information was accurate.

Data Organization Technique

Case study researchers must develop a system for storing and organizing research data (Gog, 2015). For example, researchers can use an electronic database to store and categorize documents (Tumele, 2015; Yin, 2014). I followed this recommendation by developing a case study database on an external hard drive where I stored information about the study participants and the data I collected during the interviews.

I stored study participants' information by creating a spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel with the names of the six interviewees. The spreadsheet also included each participant's e-mail address, in addition to whether the participants had signed the required consent document. The spreadsheet remained in a password-protected file on the external hard drive.

I also used the external hard drive to store and catalog case study data, including signed consent forms, interview audio files, interview transcripts, and data interpretation summaries for member checking. The external hard drive also contained information generated from the NVivo computer software program I used during data analysis. Many

researchers have use NVivo software to compile, manage, organize, and code raw qualitative data (see Ali & Lodhi, 2017; Munn & Branch, 2018; Nelson, 2016).

The external hard drive will remain inside a fireproof home office safe for 5 years, during which only I can access the drive. After this 5-year period, I plan to delete all materials permanently. Researchers who store data securely and destroy the data after a specified timeframe can help protect their study participants' privacy (Diesburg & Wang, 2010).

Data Analysis

Case study researchers must use triangulation to collect a variety of data for analysis. Triangulation is the process of using multiple methods or sources to conduct research and then comparing the results from each method or source (Krichanchai & MacCarthy, 2017). For example, Olu-Daniels and Nwibere (2014) combined multiple research methods to study a phenomenon. Other researchers have used aspects of different theories to analyze and test data related to a research problem (Vanner & Kimani, 2017). Some researchers have used multiple sources of data to explore a topic (Vanner & Kimani, 2017). Osborne and Hammoud (2017) combined semistructured interviews and a review of archived company documents to study effective strategies that communication leaders use to engage employees. I adopted a similar approach by interviewing company leaders about the strategies they use to increase employee engagement and work performance, along with reviewing company documents related to this topic.

Case study researchers are encouraged to follow a five-step process for qualitative data analysis including compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding (Yin, 2014). For this case study, I compiled company documents, interview transcripts, and member-checking data confirmed during follow-up interviews. Member checking means following up with study participants to validate researcher interpretations of the interview data and to gather additional insights (Li et al., 2013; Roth et al., 2016; Simpson & Quigley, 2016). After compiling the data, I transferred all data into Microsoft Word and manually disassembled, reassembled, and analyzed the data to identify key themes. I then transferred the data into NVivo for computer-aided disassembling, reassembling, coding, interpretation, and theme development. Various researchers have used NVivo to organize qualitative data (see Ali & Lodhi, 2017; Munn & Branch, 2018; Nelson, 2016).

After using NVivo, I compared the NVivo-generated themes with the themes I developed manually to identify consistencies. The objective of qualitative data analysis is to identify common themes that answer the central research question (Yin, 2014). The focus of the themes in this study was the strategies that business leaders used to increase employee engagement and work performance. After verifying the common themes, I compared, contrasted, and connected these themes with the key employee engagement themes from the literature review.

I used the conceptual framework as a foundation throughout this study for analyzing data, interpreting data, and developing themes. The framework for the study was Homans's (1961) social exchange theory. I explored employee engagement and work

performance using social exchange theory to identify common themes that supported the theory.

Reliability and Validity

Researchers gain respect when they conduct trustworthy data collection and analysis. For example, researchers must prove qualitative reliability, which means using consistent procedures to gather data (Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013). They also must demonstrate qualitative validity, which means that their findings are accurate (Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013). Quantitative researchers have a similar focus, as they want to demonstrate that their findings apply to a variety of people and organizations (Goffin, Raja, Claes, Szwejcowski, & Martinez, 2012). A key difference between quantitative and qualitative researchers is that qualitative researchers typically use four criteria to confirm that their study is reliable and valid: dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Goffin et al., 2012; Wang & Lien, 2013).

Dependability

I demonstrated dependability in this study by using two strategies: transcript review and member checking of data interpretations. Member checking involves asking interviewees to review and confirm the researcher's interpretations of the interview data (Li et al., 2013; Roth et al., 2016; Simpson & Quigley, 2016). After transcribing all semistructured interviews verbatim, I provided transcripts to the interviewees to ensure the information was accurate. I then reviewed the transcripts, wrote short interpretations for each interview question, and provided a printed copy of the interpretation summaries for study participants to verify during a follow-up interview.

Credibility

I maintained credibility by conducting transcript reviews and member checking. Researchers who conduct member checking offer study participants an opportunity to validate the researchers' interpretations of the interview data (Ali & Yusof, 2011; Roth et al., 2016). I also conducted data triangulation. Data triangulation involves gathering data from multiple sources (Krichanchai & MacCarthy, 2017). Sources in this study included semistructured interviews with company leaders and a review of pertinent company documents.

Transferability

This study also addressed transferability related to future research on employee engagement and work performance. Transferability is different from generalizability, which is a process where quantitative researchers who have used a small sample expand their findings and conclusions to larger populations (Manalo, 2013). Whereas quantitative researchers try to make broad claims about their findings, qualitative researchers tend to focus on one subject or group and thus cannot generalize a study's results to larger populations (Sylvain & Lamothe, 2012). Instead, qualitative researchers are able to offer transferability by helping readers understand how a study's findings relate to their own experiences (MacNaughton, Chreim, & Bourgeault, 2013).

One way to make the results of a study transferable to readers is to provide as much detail as possible about the environment where the case study research occurs (MacNaughton et al., 2013). For example, in Section 3 of this doctoral study, I provide rich descriptions about the company's size and location, the company's study

participants, the location of the interviews, and the research methods for the study. When case researchers provide details about their research environment and study participants, readers can determine whether the results are applicable to their own workplaces (MacNaughton et al., 2013). Providing thorough details can also help researchers who might want to conduct a similar study in the future. For example, if researchers decide to pursue a case study similar to this study, they can anticipate different results if they plan to use a different industry, a larger institution, or different data collection methods.

Confirmability

I used a structured protocol for asking questions and recording answers during the semistructured interviews (see Appendix) to achieve confirmability in this study. Researchers use interview protocols to guide their conversations with study participants (Meier & Geldenhuys, 2017). Using a consistent and detailed interview guide helps researchers remain objective as they ask questions and gather data (Bong & Cho, 2017; Bozer et al., 2017). I also ensured confirmability by member checking the interview data to mitigate personal biases.

Data Saturation

Data saturation adds to a study's trustworthiness. Data saturation is the point at which a researcher has gathered enough information and cannot identify new themes through additional interviews (Coenen et al., 2012; Marshall et al., 2013). One way that I achieved data saturation for this study was to conduct member checking of the interview data. During the member-checking process, study participants have an opportunity to review a researcher's interpretations of their interviews and provide additional

perspectives (Roth et al., 2016; Simpson & Quigley, 2016). Researchers can also achieve data saturation by using a proper sample size. I interviewed six company leaders and reached data saturation after the fourth interview, meaning no new themes emerged after that point. Walker (2016) conducted a similar study that involved interviewing six participants.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 included the purpose statement, the role of the researcher, an overview of the participants, and the research methodology and design for the study. Additional section topics were the population and sampling method, ethical research, data collection instruments and technique, data organization technique, and data analysis. The section concluded with a discussion of qualitative reliability and validity.

Section 3 begins with an overview of the study and a presentation of the findings. The section also includes applications to professional practice, implications for social change, and recommendations for action and further study. Section 3 concludes with researcher reflections.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies that business leaders in the service industry use to increase employee engagement and work performance. Using Homans's (1961) social exchange theory as the conceptual framework, I explored the strategies of leaders from an advertising services company headquartered in Indiana who developed and implemented strategies to increase employee engagement and work performance. Participants indicated several factors that contributed to an increasingly engaged and high-performing workforce, including offering a strong benefits package, promoting a flexible work environment, recognizing high-performing employees, empowering and trusting employees, supporting employees' professional growth, exemplifying open communication, and promoting team-building activities. Section 3 includes the presentation of the findings, application to professional practice, and implications for social change. Section 3 also includes recommendations for action and further research, personal reflections, and the conclusion of the study.

Presentation of the Findings

The intent of this qualitative single case study was to answer the central research question: What strategies do business leaders in the service industry use to increase employee engagement and work performance? To answer the question, I conducted face-to-face interviews with six leaders in a service company, XYZ Company (pseudonym), headquartered in Indiana. I also reviewed relevant documentation. XYZ Company is a mid-sized advertising agency with more than \$50 million in annual sales. This company

operates in seven states and the District of Columbia and has received a community award for its positive culture. Companies that receive community culture awards are known for their high levels of employee engagement (Rao, 2017).

Seven leaders of XYZ Company received invitations to participate in the study. The criteria for selecting participants included leaders who worked for a service company and were successful in developing strategies for increasing employee engagement and work performance. Of the seven leaders who received invitations to participate, six were available for interviews. Five participants worked at the company headquarters, and the sixth participant worked in the company's office in West Virginia. Study participants' positions ranged from vice president to senior vice president to president. I achieved data saturation after the fourth interview. Data saturation means enough information has been gathered and no new themes emerge (Coenen et al., 2012; Marshall et al., 2013).

I conducted and recorded the one-on-one semistructured interviews in a closed-door conference room at XYZ Company. The six participants responded to the seven open-ended interview questions listed in an interview protocol (see Appendix). Interviews lasted no more than 60 minutes. During the interviews, participants shared perspectives, personal experiences, and examples from the workplace regarding the strategies they used to increase employee engagement and work performance. Throughout this process, I referred to all participants using separate aliases, such as Participant 1, Participant 2, and so forth.

After the interviews, I thanked the participants for their involvement in the study. I then transcribed the recorded interviews and e-mailed the transcripts to the participants

with a request that they review the transcripts for accuracy within 2 weeks. Afterward, I conducted member-checking interviews in person at XYZ Company. The member-checking process involved providing participants with one-paragraph interpretations I developed for each of their responses to the interview questions. The purpose was to confirm my interpretations were accurate. This process also provided participants with an opportunity to share additional information about the research topic, which further enabled me to achieve data saturation.

Case study research includes the use of data triangulation, which involves gathering data from multiple sources (Krichanchai & MacCarthy, 2017). Examples include interviews, participant observations, site visits, documentation, archival records, and physical artifacts (Yin, 2014). I corroborated the data I collected during the semistructured interviews at XYZ Company by reviewing company documents. The documents included website, social media, and blog data on the company's work culture.

After completing the data collection process, I followed Yin's (2014) 5-step process for qualitative data analysis that involved compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding. I began this process by transferring all interview data into Microsoft Word and manually coding and analyzing the data to identify key themes. I then transferred the data into the NVivo 12 qualitative analysis software program for computer-aided coding, interpretation, and theme development.

I compared the themes that resulted from my manual and computer-aided data analysis processes. Four themes emerged related to the research topic: (a) leaders offer attractive employee benefits, including flexible work arrangements; (b) leaders empower

and appreciate employees; (c) leaders provide professional development opportunities; and (d) leaders foster unity through open communication and team building. All four themes confirmed common themes from the literature review for this study. Some participants' answers also reinforced Homans's (1961) social exchange theory, which indicates that two individuals who have a positive relationship typically want to return the benefits they receive from each other (Karanges et al., 2014). Participant 2 reinforced this notion by indicating that leaders who foster strong relationships with employees and care about meeting their needs tend to motivate employees to work hard in return, which can help ensure a company's success. The other five participants supported social exchange theory by emphasizing the need for leaders to set a positive example for the workforce by personally connecting with employees and treating them with respect. Participants indicated that employees who feel valued tend to reciprocate by having a positive attitude at work, doing their jobs well, and serving as personal ambassadors for the company when speaking with friends, family, and other external parties.

Theme 1: Leaders Offer Attractive Employee Benefits, Including Flexible Work Arrangements

All participants noted that leaders who offer attractive benefits motivate employees to remain engaged and work hard each day (see Table 1). Business leaders must develop benefits that can help enhance employees' quality of life at work. The best way for leaders to develop a compelling package of employee rewards is to consider employees' needs and preferences (Fisher, 2017; Ghose & Mohanty, 2016; Lardner, 2015). The study results indicated that leaders who provide better benefits demonstrate

concern for employees' well-being, which inspires workers to show concern for the company's well-being.

Table 1

Coding of Participants' Responses Related to Themes

Themes	Participants ^a	Responses ^b
1. Offer attractive benefits	6	11
2. Empower and appreciate employees	6	17
3. Provide professional development opportunities	6	13
4. Foster unity through open communication and team building	6	29
Total (duplicated)	24	70

Note. ^a Number of company leaders who provided responses linked to the themes.

^b Number of interview questions for which participant responses linked to the themes.

Three of the six participants suggested a flexible work environment as one of the most instrumental benefits leaders use to increase employee morale. For example, Participant 3 emphasized that employees can leave the office during the workday for personal commitments such as dental appointments or events at their children's schools. Participant 1 added that employees work remotely as needed, such as when a child is sick. Although employees still have the responsibility to meet their deadlines, Participant 4 said employees appreciate having the flexibility to choose the specific hours and locations where they complete their work. He said many employees at XYZ Company have young children, which makes the agency's flexible work environment likely the greatest contributor to its high retention rates. Participant 1 explained that employees who help interview job candidates often cite the agency's flexibility as one of the greatest benefits of working at the company. XYZ Company documents confirmed participants' assertions. The agency's blog indicated company leaders value employees' personal time.

According to the blog, employees who have work–life balance are able to do their best work for the company’s clients.

The findings of this study support the peer-reviewed sources in the literature review. Company leaders who provide flexible work arrangements can increase employees’ well-being, engagement, and work performance (Oludayo et al., 2018). As employees struggle to manage work and family obligations, they appreciate leaders who prioritize a work–life balance (Antony, 2018; Garg, 2015; Kaliannan et al., 2016; Odle-Dusseau et al., 2016; Sterling, 2016). Benefits such as having the option to telecommute can strengthen employees’ loyalty and commitment to their organization (Masuda et al., 2017). The findings of this study also reinforce the conceptual framework, social exchange theory, as good relationships lead to people trying to benefit each other (Karanges et al., 2014). Offering flexible work arrangements is one strategy leaders can use to maintain a positive relationship with employees and garner employees’ loyalty.

In addition to providing employees with flexible schedules and the ability to work remotely, XYZ Company leaders have recognized the importance of offering employees a well-rounded benefits package that is customizable based on age, lifestyle, income, and other factors. Participant 2 said offering attractive benefits helps maintain a competitive edge within organizations, which is why the leaders of XYZ Company have worked with its parent organization to develop a strong collection of benefits for employees.

Participant 2 and Participant 6 identified key components of the company’s benefits package, including attractive compensation, health insurance, retirement benefits, long-

term and short-term disability, parental leave, and provisions available through the Family Medical Leave Act.

Participant 2 also cited wellness programs as another area of emphasis for company leaders. For example, if employees participate in health screenings at work, they can receive a paid time-off day. Equally important to having a solid benefits package is having the flexibility to administer the package in a way that supports employees. Participant 6 indicated that if an employee needs to take extended leave for medical reasons, leaders are willing to apply their benefits policies flexibly to accommodate the employee.

These findings corroborate the literature on effective business practice. Leaders who offer extensive benefits to employees can foster a high-performance organization (Chapman et al., 2018). Chapman et al. (2018) and Farndale and Murrer (2015) identified competitive compensation as a significant component of a strong benefits package because employees who receive good pay and bonuses are more likely to remain engaged. In addition, leaders acknowledge the value of initiatives that promote employees' physical, spiritual, environmental, intellectual, emotional, occupational, and mental health (Antony, 2018). Wellness promotion benefits companies by enhancing employees' well-being, increasing their loyalty and productivity (Antony, 2018).

Another aspect of employee benefits involves listening to employees who want to suggest ideas for new benefits. Participant 4 noted that paying attention to employees' ideas has been a viable way for leaders to offer benefits that incentivize employees to stay at the agency. Employees who feel that their leaders listen to their suggestions tend

to feel more committed to the organization over the long term (Parks, 2015; Schramm, 2017). Even seemingly small benefits, such as expanding a kitchen space in XYZ Company's home office or paying for employee parking in certain locations, have improved employees' quality of life at the company.

Theme 2: Leaders Empower and Appreciate Employees

Participants noted that employees are more motivated when leaders trust and appreciate them. Business leaders must empower employees to do better work and then recognize employees who rise to the challenge. Workers who feel empowered and valued tend to work more efficiently and remain committed to achieving a company's goals (Chambers, 2015; Rana, 2015; White, 2016, 2017). All six participants emphasized that inspiring and praising employees have been instrumental in fostering an engaged and high-performing workforce.

Employee empowerment. XYZ Company leaders empower employees by displaying confidence in their abilities. Four of the six participants explained how leaders would rather give employees autonomy than micromanage them. Participant 3 noted that when employees receive assignments, they typically receive a brief explanation and then must figure out how to accomplish the established goals. Participant 3 added that employees often can own the work XYZ Company does with specific clients. Employees feel more engaged when they know they are the go-to person for a certain client because they feel a sense of responsibility for a piece of the company's business. Both Participant 3 and Participant 4 agreed that employees generally appreciate not being micromanaged and appreciate knowing that leaders are available to assist if they have a question or need

additional guidance. These findings are consistent with the literature, as research indicates that employees perform worse when they have micromanaging leaders (Hassell, 2018). The findings of the study also reinforce the conceptual framework, as empowering employees by granting them autonomy helps leaders cultivate a positive relationship with their workforce, which can lead to stronger employee commitment.

Company leaders also empower employees by soliciting their feedback on major decisions. For example, Participant 3 said that leaders often invite employees to share their perspectives on specific projects. Participant 6 added leaders often engage team members in interview processes with external job candidates. This supports Zwillinger's (2017) notion that many leaders invite current employees to participate in the interview process with job candidates to help identify interviewees who would be a good fit for the organization. Leaders who trust and empower employees to make decisions can inspire employees to perform better, to support the organization's goals, and to stay with the company over the long term (Tillott et al., 2013; Yelamanchili, 2018).

XYZ Company leaders manage the strengths of each team member to help further empower the workforce. Participant 3 noted that leaders love creating an environment where employees are encouraged to do what they do best. Participant 5 explained that employees want to do a good job and feel more engaged when they have a chance to take on tasks that allow them to showcase their talent. This sentiment supports the literature such as Helbling (2018), who acknowledged that leaders must assess and leverage employees' unique skills and strengths to motivate the team to continue performing effectively.

Employee appreciation. In addition to empowering employees to perform high-quality work, company leaders must recognize employees for their performance. Participant 6 indicated that leaders at XYZ Company prefer to catch employees in the act of doing good work and publicly praise them for their efforts rather than focus on mistakes. Leaders are proud of the company's employee-of-the-month program, which 100% of participants referenced during their interviews. The program, established in early 2016, provides an opportunity for leaders to honor one employee each month from any of the company's nine offices. Leaders typically receive three to five employee nominations monthly. In many cases, coworkers will nominate each other, and leaders are not eligible for nomination. After receiving the nominations, leaders vote on a winner, who receives praise in a staff-wide e-mail, a plaque, acknowledgment on a television screen in the home office's front lobby, and a \$50 Visa gift card. Participant 2 stated that employees often feel a sense of appreciation when they receive the honor. Participant 2 added that the program is beneficial because it recognizes employees and gives insights into some of the major projects and achievements taking place in other departments. Company documents further highlighted leaders' passion for the employee-of-the-month program. The agency's Facebook page included monthly posts highlighting program winners by publishing their photos and complementary quotes from nominators.

Along with implementing the agency's employee-of-the-month program, leaders seek additional opportunities to praise employees on a regular basis. Participant 1 and Participant 2 noted that leaders and employees occasionally send company-wide e-mails recognizing colleagues for accomplishments. Employees also receive recognition during

weekly team meetings and special events such as holiday parties and work anniversary celebrations. Participant 5 mentioned that leaders occasionally take employees to lunch to celebrate their successes and sometimes close the office early on a Friday afternoon to reward employees for major accomplishments. Participant 6 added that even little gestures, such as writing thank-you cards or sending e-mails with gold stars, have gained traction among some colleagues. Leaders understand that praising employees can motivate them to stay with the company and to bring their energy and best ideas to work. Company documents reinforced this notion. For example, the agency's blog highlighted the importance of honoring employees when they achieve a major goal, such as completing a successful campaign or winning a new client.

This emphasis on employee appreciation confirms key themes from the literature review. Multiple researchers indicated that leaders who honor hard-working employees can help employees feel a sense of accomplishment, which can influence them to remain committed to the company's objectives (Rana, 2015; White, 2016, 2017). Rewarding high performers in front of their peers can also contribute to a positive work culture by incentivizing others to perform better (Antony, 2018). In addition, employees who receive recognition often feel obligated to maintain high levels of involvement and engagement (Sugandini et al., 2018).

Theme 3: Leaders Provide Professional Development Opportunities

Employees have a greater desire to invest their time and energy at a company if they know that company leaders are willing to invest in employees' development. Multiple researchers support the notion that leaders who offer programs to increase

employee knowledge and competence are more likely to increase engagement and work performance within their organizations (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016; Gupta, 2015; Peterson, 2015; Presbitero, 2017). Approximately 67% of study participants acknowledged that employees feel more motivated when they have opportunities to learn and grow at work.

Participant 4 acknowledged that XYZ Company would benefit from a formal, comprehensive development program. Nonetheless, Participant 4, along with Participant 1 and Participant 6, cited the company's monthly lunch-and-learn program as one strategy for fostering employees' personal and professional growth. Participant 4 noted that the lunch-and-learns typically cover job-related topics such as virtual reality and personal topics such as finance. Although some external speakers have presented at these events, employees have also presented in the past and used it as an opportunity to develop their public speaking skills. Leaders also encourage employees to attend offsite seminars and events where they can learn from peers in their vocation. Participant 1 indicated that, in many cases, leaders attend these events and update company employees on what they learned.

Leaders also give employees on-the-job challenges to help expand their skill sets. Participant 3 expressed that employees who are continually challenged are less likely to become complacent in their roles and are more likely to remain engaged. On-the-job challenges also position employees for advancement opportunities. Participant 2 indicated that leaders are continually thinking about succession planning within the agency. Participant 6 corroborated this notion, adding that leaders typically aim to hire from within before seeking talent outside the agency. Participant 1 expressed that

employees appreciate having the opportunity at XYZ Company to advance from the role of account coordinator, to account executive, to senior account executive, to account supervisor. Participant 1 said that women especially appreciate having leadership opportunities at the company, which received a local award in 2017 for its women-friendly work environment. Participants noted that employees feel fulfilled when they are continually learning and are not stifled in their current role. Company documents supported the focus on professional growth. For example, XYZ Company's blog indicated that employees who learn new skills are more likely to grow within the agency. The company's Facebook page also highlighted the leadership team's focus on mentoring new employees to help them acclimate to their roles.

These findings confirmed research from the literature review. Breevaart et al. (2015) and Izard-Carroll (2016) indicated that employees feel more engaged and are willing to work harder when they receive opportunities for career development. Sange and Srivastava (2012) also noted that employees feel more connected to their work when they receive proper mentorship. Leaders who offer growth opportunities show that they care about giving employees the knowledge and experiences required to succeed throughout their careers (Shah & Gupta, 2018). This strategy of offering professional growth opportunities aligns with the study's conceptual framework, social exchange theory, as investing in employees' career development is one way to foster a favorable relationship with the workforce.

Theme 4: Leaders Foster Unity Through Open Communication and Team Building

Study participants indicated that employees have higher engagement and performance when teams are united. Unity leads to teamwork, which is vital to achieving organizational goals (Benrazavi & Silong, 2013). Study participants explained that XYZ Company leaders foster unity through open communication and team building. Company documents, specifically the agency's blog, reinforced that promoting open communication and cooperation motivates employees to work together to produce high-quality work.

Open communication. Participant 1 identified communication as one of the highest priorities because it helps cultivate camaraderie among employees across XYZ Company's footprint. From a written communication perspective, leaders leverage multiple platforms to communicate agency-wide. For example, Participant 1 and Participant 2 noted that leaders send staff-wide e-mails to share consistent messages with employees in all nine offices. Three participants also cited the company's monthly newsletter as a valuable avenue for updating the workforce. The newsletter highlights key information such as new client wins, creative campaigns, and upcoming events so that all employees receive the same information and feel connected. This focus on internal communication supports the literature review. Multiple researchers have discussed the importance of using internal communication tools to unify and engage employees (Karanges et al., 2014; Korzynski, 2015; Nadim, 2015).

From an oral communication perspective, XYZ Company leaders leverage in-person meetings to foster open communication and increase community and morale.

Three study participants noted that each department has weekly meetings to allow teammates to describe their current workloads, discuss opportunities to support each other, solve problems, and share best practices. Although employees in satellite offices are unable to attend most meetings in person, Participant 1 explained that they can attend via Skype to feel connected. This team meeting strategy supports the literature, as Seymour and Geldenhuys (2018) indicated that team dialogue can have a positive influence on employee engagement within firms. In addition to hosting team meetings, leaders typically participate in weekly one-on-one meetings with their employees. Participant 4 said that these meetings allow employees to drive the agenda and share assignment updates, challenges, and needs. Participant 6 has also developed the habit of spontaneously checking on employees to discuss their activities and concerns. Participant 2 added that leaders enjoy hosting offsite lunches or social hours for employees to foster ongoing communication. Interviewees noted that each of these activities fosters collaboration, which motivates employees to stay engaged and to perform well.

Regarding day-to-day communication, about 67% of participants said that they encourage employees to speak with each other via phone or in person versus relying on e-mail. This sentiment aligns with research from Men and Hung-Baesecke (2015) and O'Neill et al. (2015), who learned that employees feel most unified and engaged when leaders and peers use face-to-face communication. Participant 5 explained that employees tend to feel a personal connection when they hear each other's voices or look into one another's eyes during a conversation. Conversely, Participant 5 stated that employees can easily misconstrue tone in e-mail messages. Participant 2, Participant 3, and Participant 4

also emphasized the need for employees to speak openly with each other if a conflict or issue arises. In some situations, Participant 4 invites conflicting parties to a conference room to facilitate challenging conversations face to face. This approach supports the literature on effective business practice. Both Kumar and Raghavendran (2015) and Reade and Lee (2016) indicated that managing conflict among employees can help increase employee performance, innovation, and loyalty.

Some notable outliers emerged from the research data regarding XYZ Company's communication tools and practices. After highlighting some of the company's strengths, Participant 4 acknowledged that the company still has opportunities to be even more effective. For example, Participant 4 noted that leaders might benefit from establishing other communication tools, such as a mechanism to receive anonymous comments and suggestions from employees. Participant 4 added that leaders could use videoconferencing technology more frequently when meeting with employees in remote locations. A need also exists for a centralized program management tool so that all employees have access to the same information. Participant 4 expressed that the agency's informality has led to some of these communication-related inefficiencies.

Although using effective communication tools is important, study participants emphasized that the topics leaders communicate are equally important to fostering a sense of community, engagement, and high performance. For example, Participant 1 and Participant 2 mentioned that leaders seek opportunities to communicate about employees' personal life events, including weddings, birthdays, and new additions to the family. Company documents, specifically the agency's Facebook page, reinforced this idea by

celebrating employees' life events. Study participants indicated that employees are more likely to work hard when they feel connected to their coworkers and when they believe that their leaders value them professionally and personally.

Participant 2 and Participant 6 indicated that they also communicate job expectations to help employees understand their specific roles and the best way to contribute. Interviewees noted that performance reviews provide a valuable opportunity to promote two-way communication about leader expectations and employee accomplishments. This notion aligns with the literature, in which researchers indicate that employees have higher engagement when they have a clear understanding of their role (Tillott et al., 2013; Tucker, 2017). Participant 5 and Participant 6 added that company leaders promote unity and trust by updating employees on major agency developments, the rationale behind company decisions, the company's financial goals, and the way satellite offices contribute to the agency's financial performance. This strategy supports the literature on effective business practice. DeAscentis (2016), Ergle (2015), and Lavigna (2015) asserted that clearly communicating company information, business goals, and the rationale behind company changes helps employees feel more connected to the company and less likely to resist change. Participant 6 explained that employees feel more engaged when leaders are transparent about information that other companies keep classified. Participant 6 also said transparent communication is critical in an ever-evolving business climate.

Team building. Along with promoting open communication, business leaders at XYZ Company promote team-building strategies to foster unity and enhance worker

engagement and performance. Multiple participants mentioned that the agency has a Fun Committee whose members organize team activities such as barbecues and baseball stadium outings. On occasion, the agency closes early so colleagues can socialize outside of work. Employees also collaborate on community service activities. According to company documents such as the agency's blog and Facebook page, colleagues work together on events including cook-offs to help raise money for local nonprofit organizations. These strategies support findings from researchers who assert that employees who participate in team-building and social activities tend to feel more unified (Becker & Tews, 2016; Krishnaveni & Monica, 2016; Kumar & Raghavendran, 2015; Paton, 2016; Plester & Hutchison, 2016). These strategies also align with this study's conceptual framework, social exchange theory, as promoting team-building activities is one way to foster positive interactions with employees.

Participant 3, Participant 5, and Participant 6 added that leaders who want to cultivate a team-oriented environment must model collaboration and mutual care. This means not placing blame on others when a mistake occurs and not asking employees to complete assignments that leaders would not want to do themselves. Both Participant 3 and Participant 5 mentioned that leaders should treat others how they want others to treat them, which is paramount to helping employees feel unified, inspired, and valued. The literature corroborates this concept, as Ong and Yaqiong (2018) emphasized that leaders' behaviors directly influence employees' attitudes, satisfaction, and loyalty at work.

Study participants noted that another team-building strategy has involved inviting new ideas from all employees, even employees who work outside of XYZ Company's

creative department. Participants indicated that this mind-set helps foster unity by reinforcing that all employees are part of one large team. Leaders who listen to all employees' perspectives can help employees feel more committed at work (Parks, 2015). Study participants also promote cohesiveness by hiring interns who fit into the culture based on the way they interact, their work ethic, their attitudes, their detail orientation, and their ability to follow through on commitments. Leaders of service companies should build a team of strong employees to foster a collaborative and engaged workforce that helps the company remain competitive (Herbert, 2016). Participant 1 acknowledged that hiring employees who integrate well with the agency's culture has helped to foster a unified, engaged, and high-performing workforce at XYZ Company.

Study participants agreed that the company's employee engagement strategies have enhanced the agency's culture and performance. Participant 5 indicated that some employees who have left the agency for other jobs strongly desire to return after they realize that few workplaces have XYZ Company's culture. Participant 5 said that leaders are encouraged to have employees who love working at the company and who are willing to tell others about how much they love it. Participant 6 agreed, noting that employee engagement should continue to increase as agency leaders adhere to the philosophies and family values that have helped the culture to thrive.

Findings Related to the Conceptual Framework

I used Homans's (1961) social exchange theory to explore the strategies that business leaders use to increase employee engagement and work performance. Based on the theory, employees experience a series of interactions with company leaders

(Oparaocha, 2016; Reader et al., 2017). When employees and leaders have a positive relationship, they want to reciprocate the trust and respect they receive from each other. This theory is consistent with research included in this study. For example, Karanges et al. (2014) affirmed that two individuals who have a good relationship seek opportunities to benefit each other. Ko and Hur (2014) also indicated that company leaders who create a positive work environment for employees can make employees content and more likely to stay with the company.

Study participants corroborated social exchange theory. Participant 5 expressed that when leaders treat employees well, employees are more likely to respond by working hard, having fun, and making money. Participant 2 and Participant 3 also noted that treating employees with respect helps employees feel more passionate about getting up every day, going to work, and helping the company succeed. All four themes outlined in this study represent strategies that leaders use to treat employees well and sustain a positive relationship with them: (a) offer attractive benefits, including flexible work arrangements; (b) empower and appreciate employees; (c) provide professional development opportunities; and (d) foster unity through open communication and team building. Employees at XYZ Company have responded to these strategies by demonstrating higher engagement at work. Participant 4 and Participant 5 added that this higher engagement has led to high work performance, as employees are eager to do a good job and to help their teammates succeed.

Applications to Professional Practice

The specific business problem for this study was that some business leaders in the service industry lack strategies for increasing employee engagement and work performance. The results of this study reveal the strategies that leaders at an advertising services company use to achieve these objectives. The findings are applicable to advancing business practice because they include specific suggestions for creating an environment where employees are excited to come to work and help the company prosper.

The results of this study included the following suggestions for leaders to improve business practice: offer attractive medical and financial benefits, provide incentives for employee participation in wellness programs, and provide flexible work hours and telecommuting options. Other suggestions included trusting employees to do their jobs, inviting them to help make decisions to benefit the company, giving them tasks that capitalize on their strengths, and recognizing their achievements publicly. Other important recommendations involved encouraging employees to attend professional development programs, promoting transparency in written and face-to-face communications, showing concern for employees' personal lives, discussing performance expectations, and updating the workforce on key company decisions. Additional recommendations consisted of developing team-building activities such as social outings to foster cohesiveness, demonstrating mutual respect for employees, welcoming ideas from all members of the workforce, and hiring employees who integrate well with the culture.

These findings are relevant to improved business practice as they represent strategies that other researchers, including Karanges et al. (2014), Paton (2016), and Presbitero (2017), have noted are critical to fostering a positive work culture. Multiple researchers acknowledge a link between a company's culture and its ability to engage employees (Blattner & Walter, 2015; Hicks & Knies, 2015; Jones, 2015). Engaged employees tend to have better performance (Hough et al., 2015; Jha & Kumar, 2016; Kusuma & Madasu, 2015; Tims et al., 2015). The findings of this study can guide leaders who struggle to cultivate an environment where employees remain engaged and hard working. Following the recommended strategies can help leaders advance business practice by increasing employee passion and performance, which can contribute to a company's competitiveness and growth (Kerns, 2014; van der Walt, 2018).

Implications for Social Change

Using the findings from this study to improve employee engagement within firms could lead to positive social change by helping individuals, organizations, and communities prosper. From an individual perspective, engaged workers tend to feel happier, healthier, safer, and more secure (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2016; Jevé et al., 2015). Engaged employees also tend to have positive interactions with coworkers, clients, and other stakeholders (Muscalu et al., 2013). Increasing employee engagement can therefore benefit individuals by enhancing their social behaviors toward each other and their quality of life.

From an organizational standpoint, engaged workers are less likely to leave their firms for other jobs (Caesens et al., 2016; Ponting et al., 2016; Treuren & Halvorsen,

2016). Higher employee retention within firms can save companies time and money by eliminating the need to extensively recruit and train new employees (Guha & Chakrabarti, 2016). These savings can lead to higher productivity and profitability within companies (Jha & Kumar, 2016), which can benefit society by spurring economic growth.

Profitable companies are also more likely to benefit society through charitable giving. More business leaders are recognizing the importance of corporate philanthropy in the areas where they operate (Hogarth, Hutchinson, & Scaife, 2016). Charitable donations from profitable firms can help address social issues such as poverty within local communities (Vyas, 2015; Whyman et al., 2015).

Recommendations for Action

In this qualitative single case study, I explored the strategies that business leaders in a service company use to increase employee engagement and work performance. The findings can benefit company leaders who desire to keep employees motivated and productive. Employee productivity is critical to organizational success in an increasingly competitive marketplace (Beattie & Crossan, 2015). The recommendations from this research study may aid (a) company leaders who already have engaged employees but are seeking new ideas for sustaining their engagement, (b) company leaders who struggle to keep employees engaged, and (c) students and researchers who desire to study employee engagement strategies that can advance business practice.

Five recommended steps for action include the following: (a) identify new benefits strategies that appeal to employees, (b) establish practices and programs for

empowering and publicly recognizing high-performing employees, (c) develop or identify programming that can help employees grow professionally, (d) brainstorm communication strategies that promote transparency, and (e) seek team-building activities to foster unity. Rather than developing lofty goals to fulfill each recommended action, leaders would benefit by starting with small, realistic goals and setting a specific timeframe for achieving them. They could revisit each goal regularly to determine how employees have responded to their ideas and what changes are worth considering.

The first recommendation is to identify new benefits strategies that appeal to employees. Leaders could begin by evaluating their current benefits offerings and brainstorming at least one new benefit for employees. Examples range from creating new wellness programs to offering occasional telecommuting options depending on the nature of employees' work. Leaders could solicit input from employees to identify what types of new benefits they would prefer and then make a determination based on this feedback.

The second recommendation is to establish practices and programs for empowering and recognizing high-performing employees. A viable way to start is to seek small opportunities to empower workers by inviting them into key decision-making processes, such as hiring decisions for job candidates. Leaders can also empower workers by using strengths assessments to identify their talents and then planning assignments accordingly. From a recognition standpoint, leaders can have a brainstorming session to develop new ideas for recognizing hard workers, such as an employee-of-the-month program where colleagues can nominate each other.

The third recommendation involves identifying or developing programs to help employees grow professionally. For example, leaders could explore opportunities for employees to attend external conferences to meet and learn from peers in the business. If financial restrictions make this approach unfeasible, leaders could initiate internal development programs, such as lunch-and-learns and mentoring programs.

The fourth recommendation involves brainstorming communication strategies that promote transparency. Leaders can begin by evaluating existing written communication tools and identifying new tools, such as a regular company newsletter or blog, that could provide frequent company updates to the workforce. In addition, leaders could develop a habit of spontaneously checking on employees or scheduling one-on-one touch-base meetings to maintain open lines of communication. Just as important, leaders have an opportunity to model effective communication by engaging in fewer e-mail conversations in favor of more phone and face-to-face communication.

The fifth recommendation involves seeking team-building activities to foster unity. A practical way to begin is to plan social outings with team members so that they can connect outside of work. Leaders can also build stronger teams by inviting employees across the company to collaborate on projects such as community service activities.

Participants in this study will receive a one- or two-page summary of the study's findings via e-mail and an electronic copy of the completed study if they are interested. Plans also include publishing this study in the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Database. In addition, I will identify opportunities to present the research findings in business meetings and other relevant forums.

Recommendations for Further Study

I conducted a qualitative single case study to explore what strategies business leaders use to increase employee engagement and work performance. Researchers should conduct further studies to address a couple of key limitations of this study: geographic location and sample size. The study participants I interviewed worked at an advertising services company headquartered in Indiana. Future researchers could extend the geographical location to other areas of the United States, as business leaders in other regions might have unique employee engagement philosophies worth exploring. In addition, the results of this study might not apply to all workplaces, populations, and industries. Future researchers could conduct multiple case studies, use a larger sample size, and research companies outside of the service industry.

I recommend that future researchers adhere to some of the delimitations of this study. For example, they could continue exploring the concepts of employee engagement and work performance, as opportunities abound to gain new insights on these phenomena. Researchers could also employ purposeful sampling to identify business leaders who can address the topic effectively. However, future researchers might consider using a quantitative or mixed-methods approach to incorporate statistical data on the topic. They could also gather data from a company's workforce via surveys or focus groups to identify employees' viewpoints on the strategies that leaders use to enhance their engagement and work performance. Collecting data from employees can help corroborate or negate perspectives from company leaders.

Reflections

When I embarked on this journey, I was eager to expand my knowledge and understanding of doctoral-level research. I voraciously studied topics such as research methodologies, research designs, data collection techniques, and qualitative validity and reliability strategies. Although this preparation was educational, nothing was more enlightening than undergoing the process firsthand and experiencing the successes and challenges that accompanied each stage of the journey. Achieving milestones such as identifying a research topic, solidifying a problem statement and research question, identifying a case study organization, and collecting and analyzing data required detailed planning and perseverance. I have greater respect and appreciation for the strategic thinking and level of detail required to plan, conduct, and present credible research.

All researchers have personal biases and preconceived ideas and values that could influence their data collection and analysis. I mitigated my own biases by using strategies such as not conducting interviews at my place of employment. In addition, I used an interview protocol (see Appendix) to maintain consistency during my conversations with study participants. I also conducted member-checking interviews with participants to confirm my interpretations of the data I collected.

The interview process was particularly rewarding for me, as leaders seemed humbled to discuss their employees' level of engagement and work performance. I was equally humbled after seeing how much the leaders respected their workforce. The strategies I gleaned are worth sharing with colleagues and implementing throughout my career.

Summary and Study Conclusions

Increasing employee engagement and work performance within firms is vital to ensuring companies remain profitable and competitive (Anand, 2017; Baker, 2017). However, some business leaders struggle to develop strategies for effectively engaging their workforce (Plaskoff, 2017). The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to answer the research question “What strategies do business leaders in the service industry use to increase employee engagement and work performance?” Six leaders at an advertising services company headquartered in Indiana participated in semistructured interviews to address this question. I supplemented the interviews by reviewing company documents, including the firm’s website, blog, and social media data. Four themes emerged following data collection and analysis: (a) leaders offer attractive company benefits, including flexible work arrangements; (b) leaders empower and appreciate employees; (c) leaders provide professional development opportunities; and (d) leaders foster unity through open communication and team building. The findings indicated that business leaders who leverage these strategies can nurture an environment where employees are engaged, willing to work hard, and eager to contribute to their company’s long-term prosperity.

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Appendix: Semistructured Interview Protocol and Interview Questions

	Interview Protocol
What the researcher will do	What the researcher will say (script)
Introduce the interview and set the stage	<p>Thank you for your participation in this case study. As a reminder, I am YaVonda Ulfig, a doctoral student at Walden University, and I will go ahead and provide you with a copy of the consent form you previously signed. As the consent form indicates, this research study focuses on what strategies business leaders use to increase employee engagement and work performance. I am interviewing company leaders who have successfully developed, deployed, and implemented strategies that helped contribute to the company's increased employee engagement and work performance. I will ask you a series of questions on this topic, and I invite you to respond with as much detail and information as appropriate. Before we begin, do you have any questions or concerns related to the consent form you signed or to the interview process in general?</p> <p>Thank you. At this time, I will go ahead and turn on the audio recorder to capture our conversation.</p> <p>I would like to introduce Participant 1, who is conducting a semistructured interview for this case study on the [date] day of [current month] in the year 2018. The current time is [time].</p>
Watch for non-verbal cues Paraphrase as needed Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in-depth	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What leadership strategies do you use to increase employee engagement and work performance? 2. What talent management strategies do you use to increase employee engagement and work performance? 3. What employee benefits strategies do you use to increase employee engagement and work performance? 4. What employee recognition strategies do you use to increase employee engagement and work performance? 5. What communication strategies do you use to increase employee engagement and work performance? 6. What additional strategies do you use to increase employee engagement and work performance? 7. What other information would you like to share?
Wrap up interview thanking participant	This concludes our interview. I would like to thank you for participating in this interview and, as a reminder, do not hesitate to reach out to me using the contact information in your consent form if you have follow-up questions or concerns.
Schedule follow-up member-checking interview	I will transcribe our interview and provide it for your review soon, so you can confirm that it accurately reflects our conversation today. After that, I will briefly summarize my interpretations for each question and would appreciate the opportunity to revisit with you for a short follow-up interview. What day and time works best for you for this follow-up interview?

Follow-up Member-Checking Interview Protocol	
What the researcher will do	What the researcher will say (script)
Introduce follow-up interview and set the stage	Thank you for the opportunity to revisit with you to follow up on our previous interview. As a reminder, after our previous conversation, I reviewed the transcripts and briefly summarized my interpretations for each interview question. The purpose of this follow-up interview is to give you an opportunity to review my interpretations to determine if any information needs to be corrected, and to share any additional information or insights.
Share a copy of the succinct synthesis for each individual question	At this time, I will provide you with my interpretations for each individual question, and you will have an opportunity to review them and provide feedback one at a time.
Bring in probing questions related to other information the researcher may have found – note the information must be related so that the researcher is probing and adhering to the IRB approval.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Question #1 and succinct synthesis of the interpretation 2. Question #2 and succinct synthesis of the interpretation 3. Question #3 and succinct synthesis of the interpretation 4. Question #4 and succinct synthesis of the interpretation 5. Question #5 and succinct synthesis of the interpretation 6. Question #6 and succinct synthesis of the interpretation 7. Question #7 and succinct synthesis of the interpretation
Walk through each question, read the interpretation, and ask: Did I miss anything? What would you like to add?	
Wrap up follow-up interview by thanking participant	This concludes our follow-up interview. I would like to thank you, again, for participating in this process. I will send you a summary of the findings and an electronic copy of the completed study if you are interested. Thank you for your time.