A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY EXAMINING LEADER-TO-EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT TECHNIQUES WITHIN SELECTED NONPROFITS

By

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

This study sought to obtain a more in-depth understanding of leader-to-employee engagement. To obtain this deeper understanding, a qualitative case study was conducted utilizing a semi-structured interview process. Interviews were carried out with leaders working for selected nonprofit organizations. Throughout the interview process, information was gathered to contribute to the current body of knowledge regarding leader-to-employee engagement. Leaders in the study felt strong commitment, open communication, employee empowerment, and honesty were techniques needed to develop leader-to-employee engagement. Participants noted they were more successful when engaging with their employees if they integrated these techniques. Leaders also identified the major challenges they face when trying to engage with their employees. These challenges include the need for more information available regarding leader-to-employee engagement and resource availability.

Keywords: *collaboration, leader-to-employee, engagement, communication*

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Approvals

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Dr. Michael Coleman, Committee Member	Date
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Section One: Foundation of the Study

This research examined leader-to-employee engagement within selected Ohio nonprofits. Section one of the research assesses the problem under examination, the purpose of the study, the guiding research questions, and the conceptual framework. Information presented in section one of the study lays the foundation for the research. The foundation of the study includes an overview of current literature available regarding leader-to-employee engagement. Section one of the study concludes with a summary and a transition into section two of the study.

Background of the Problem

Successful employee engagement has emerged as an important focus for management when trying to improve operations (Gupta & Sharma, 2016). Improved employee engagement provides many incentives for an organization. Incentives include better employee retention and more efficient collaboration. Even with employee engagements volume of references in literature, there is still no clear and widely accepted definition of employee engagement. Without a clear definition in literature, employee engagement has been defined and measured in different ways (Borah & Barua, 2018). More information is needed regarding leader-to-employee engagement to provide clarity towards understanding employee engagement.

Current literature has highlighted two major challenges facing nonprofit leaders when trying to establish employee engagement. These challenges include the need for more information available pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement and resource availability. Nonprofit leaders are tasked with trying to engage employees with gaps in information pertaining to employee engagement (Park, 2017). Nonprofit leaders are also tasked with trying to provide service to their surrounding communities while having fewer available resources

(Bouek, 2018). The background of the problem provides an overview of the challenges nonprofit leadership faces when trying to engage employees.

Understanding and defining employee engagement is identified as a major challenge in research (Gerst, 2013). A challenge in defining employee engagement can be linked to the need for more information pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement. Park (2017) determined the need for more information pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement is due to previous studies focusing on the relationship between mid-level managers and front-line workers, rather than addressing all employee relationships. To address the need for more literature pertaining to employee engagement, a more in-depth approach must be taken (Chowdhury, 2019). More information must be obtained and contributed to the current body of knowledge pertaining to employee engagement. This research study gathered information to contribute to the current body of knowledge regarding employee engagement.

The need for information was identified by literature as one of the challenges nonprofit leaders face when trying to engage employees. The other challenge nonprofit leaders face when trying to engage employees are the availability of resources (Skinner, 2017). Nonprofit leaders are tasked with trying to support their employees with fewer resources available (Cronley & Kim, 2014). Nonprofit leaders must also try to serve their surrounding communities through collaboration efforts with less available capital and resources (Bouek, 2018). Laurett and Ferreira (2018) noted nonprofit leaders have less capital to disperse and are more likely to put this money into departments that will help to serve their mission, making engagement trainings less of a priority. The need for more information pertaining to employee engagement and the challenge of resource availability have been presented in literature as major challenges facing nonprofit leaders when trying to establish employee engagement. These challenges create the background for the problem that was examined in this research study.

Problem Statement

The general problem to be addressed in the study was the lack of knowledge pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement within selected YMCAs and Salvation Army offices, resulting in a decrease of collaborative tasks being carried out successfully. Park (2017) argued the lack of research regarding employee engagement can impact the level of knowledge leaders have regarding employee engagement. Borah and Barua (2018) determined a need for more available information for leaders regarding leader-to-employee engagement is due to the varying ways success is measured in literature. A lack of research regarding leader-to-employee engagement makes it challenging for leaders to obtain a better understanding of employee engagement techniques (Benevene et al., 2019). Understanding engagement strategies is necessary for leadership, as effective employee engagement works as the foundation for organizational growth (Lonsmann, 2017). Jones and Stater (2019) asserted that when leaders are ineffective in developing employee engagement, the organization experiences higher turnover rates. Peer-reviewed research and literature supports the need for future studies to cover leader-to-employee engagement. The specific problem to be addressed in the study was the lack of knowledge possessed by leaders working for selected YMCAs and Salvation Army offices resulting in a decrease of collaborative tasks being carried out successfully. The collaborative tasks being carried out unsuccessfully include ones utilized to provide services to the organization’s surrounding communities.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to contribute to the current literature regarding employee engagement by bridging the gap in research pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement within selected YMCAs and Salvation Army offices. Information obtained from the study was used to contribute to the current body of knowledge related to leader-to-employee engagement. The problem regarding the need for more information relating to leader-to-employee engagement was examined through a qualitative case study. This qualitative case study examined leader-to-employee engagement within selected YMCAs and Salvation Army offices within Ohio.

Nature of the Study

A qualitative case study was the chosen methodology to examine leader-to-employee engagement techniques within the selected YMCAs and the Salvation Army offices located in Ohio. A review of the literature showed that utilization of leader-to-employee engagement techniques are necessary for organizations to effectively carry out collaborative tasks, but further study is needed to build upon the techniques (Owusu-Ansah, 2018). Taneja et al. (2015) determined there is a need for leaders to have an in-depth understanding of engagement techniques. A more thorough understanding of employee engagement can assist leaders in developing effective techniques for engaging employees (Taneja et al., 2015).

Discussion of Method

Stake (2010) determined that conducting a qualitative study allows for a more in-depth understanding of the topic. Incorporating a qualitative approach provided an opportunity to obtain an abundance of data to contribute to the current level of knowledge regarding leader-to-employee engagement. Obtaining enough information to saturate the data was an important focus of the study. Data saturation refers to the point when signs of redundancy appear and no new information is presented (Hennink et al., 2017). A qualitative methodology was chosen over a quantitative methodology due to the need for a more in-depth understanding of leadership's level of knowledge regarding employee engagement techniques. Sutton and Austin (2015) stated unlike a quantitative methodology, which is a more structured approach that utilizes numerical data, a qualitative methodology allows the researcher to gain a better understanding of the topic. Agee (2009) determined the more in-depth approach of a qualitative methodology allows the researcher to obtain further insight, which enabled the opportunity to add to the current body of knowledge regarding leader-to-employee engagement.

Discussion of Design

A case study approach was selected to examine the level of knowledge pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement techniques within selected YMCAs and Salvation Army offices. Utilizing a case study allowed the researcher to determine the desired depth of the in-sight that was being explored through the use of gathered documents and onsite interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Once the data was obtained through the onsite interviews, information was categorized to examine themes. The data collection process is presented in section two of this research study. Before selecting a case study approach, alternative methods were examined.

The approaches rejected for the study were the narrative approach and the grounded theory approach. The narrative approach was rejected for the qualitative study, as the narrative approach explores the issues around the research problem in a chronological order by posing story-based questions (Robson & McCartan, 2016). The case study design was selected as more effective as the researcher can supplicate descriptive questions directly to the participants, which enables the opportunity to ask probing questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The other potential method that was rejected over a case study design was the grounded theory approach. The grounded theory approach is most efficient when the researcher is interested in generating new theories from the information collected (Robson & McCartan, 2016). A focus of the study was to add to the current body of knowledge regarding leader-to-employee engagement techniques as opposed to generating new theories.

Research Paradigm

The research paradigm that influenced the study was a social constructivism. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a social constructivism paradigm is concerned with gaining an understanding of a phenomenon through the experiences of individuals. The incorporation of the social constructivist paradigm influenced the qualitative study to conduct interviews with participants to gather in-depth information from each participant. Through the interview process, multiple interpretations of leader-to-employee engagement were gathered. Information collected was coded and organized to help identify themes. Themes were than categorized to help contribute information to the current body of knowledge regarding leader-to-employee engagement.

Summary of the Nature of the Study

A case study design was determined to be the most effective method to address the general and specific problems of this study and contribute to the current body of knowledge regarding employee engagement. Stake (2010) determined carrying out a qualitative case study allows for a more in-depth understanding of the topic being examined. Information obtained through utilization of a qualitative case study contributed to the current body of knowledge regarding employee engagement. By obtaining in-depth information from each participant, the study was able to address the purpose of the research and add to the current body of knowledge pertaining to employee engagement.

Research Questions

Research questions were necessary for fulfilling the objective outlined of adding to the current information regarding employee engagement. Information obtained from the study was useful in addressing the lack of knowledge pertaining to employee engagement within the selected YMCAs and Salvation Army offices. Successfully addressing issues pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement techniques are a primary objective in developing strong collaboration efforts within an organization (Silard, 2018). Effective leader-to-employee engagement techniques can contribute to increased productivity and more operational success (Mehrzi & Singh, 2016). The qualitative research questions below work to guide the study. Terminology used in the research questions, such as successful employee engagement and challenges facing employee engagement, are defined in the terms section of the study.

RQ1: What are successful engagement techniques used by leaders in selected YMCAs and Salvation Army offices located in Ohio?

RQ2: What are challenges leaders working for the selected YMCAs and Salvation Army offices face when trying to engage employees?

RQ3: What leadership actions or behaviors contribute to establishing strong employee engagement techniques within selected YMCAs and Salvation Army offices located in Ohio?

Conceptual Framework

Two theories that guided this qualitative case study were the leader-member exchange theory (LMX) and the path-goal theory. The LMX theory and the path-goal theory helped to gain a better understanding of the multitude of facets that can impact leadership's ability to engage employees. A conceptual view of the research indicated that leadership's level of knowledge regarding employee engagement serves as a contributor to the organization's overall performance (Fletcher, 2016). A leader's level of knowledge pertaining to employee engagement impacts the ability of an organization to carry out collaborative tasks, which directly affects the level of success achieved by the organization (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016). Justification for selecting the LMX theory and the path-goal theory are examined within this section of the study.

Leader-Member Exchange Theory

The LMX theory centers on interactions between a leader and follower (Northouse, 2019). It has been adopted as a guiding theory for numerous studies that examined information regarding leader-to-employee engagement. Lloyd et al. (2017) utilized the LMX theory to examine how important it is for leadership to establish strong employee relationships. The use of the LMX theory helped Lloyd et al. (2017) find the information needed for leadership to establish a strong relationship with their employees. Valle et al. (2019) incorporated the LMX theory into their study to gain a better understanding of the relationships between a leader and subordinates. By incorporating the LMX theory, Valle et al. (2019) identified the gaps in knowledge pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement. The research teams were able to utilize the LMX theory to identify gaps in knowledge and build upon the current information relating to leader-to-employee engagement.

Utilization of the LMX theory supported this qualitative study by guiding the researcher to obtain information that allowed for a better understanding of the challenge's leaders face when trying to engage employees. Similar to the findings by Lloyd et al. (2017), the LMX theory supported this qualitative study by working to identify gaps in information regarding leader-to-employee engagement techniques. Identifying these gaps assisted in addressing the qualitative research questions for the study. Utilizing the LMX theory assisted in obtaining more information regarding techniques leadership can use to successfully engage employees.

Path-Goal Theory

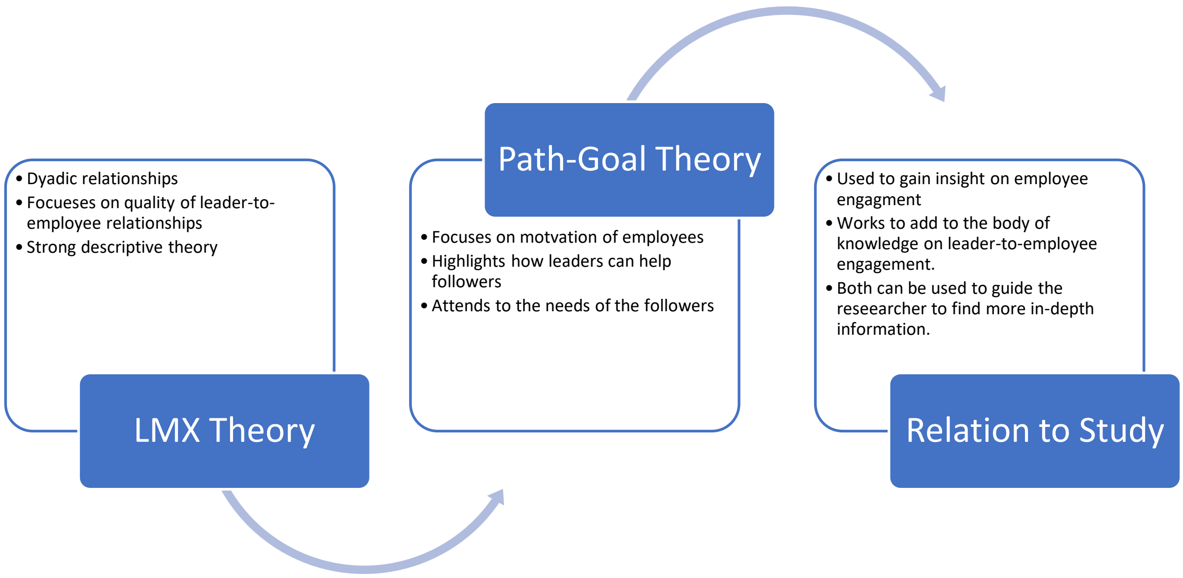
The path-goal theory also worked as a guiding theory for this qualitative case study. The path-goal theory examines how leaders can motivate followers to accomplish their tasks (Northouse, 2019). To address the needs of the overarching general problem regarding the reduction of available knowledge pertaining to employee engagement, the path-goal theory was selected. Utilization of the path-goal theory has worked as a guiding theory for a number of studies examining leader-to-employee relationships. Farhan (2018) incorporated the path-goal theory to identify the need for more knowledge regarding shared learning between leadership and their subordinates. The path-goal theory helped Farhan (2018) to further examine the relationship between leadership and their subordinates from a motivational perspective. Famakin and Abisuga (2016) utilized the path-goal theory to examine the factors that work to create a strong relationship between leadership and their subordinates. Utilization of the path-goal theory supported Famakin and Abisuga (2016) in identifying key strategies that leadership can use to engage their employees.

The use of the path-goal theory benefited the qualitative case study by assisting in addressing the concerns of the general and specific problems. Similar to the findings by Famakin and Abisuga (2016), the path-goal theory helped guide the study towards obtaining more information regarding how leadership can effectively engage with employees. The information obtained through the incorporation of the path-goal theory was used to address the need for more information pertaining to employee engagement. The use of the path-goal theory benefited this qualitative case study by facilitating the opportunity to obtain more information regarding employee engagement, similar to the study by Farhan (2018).

Relationship Between Concepts and Potential Trends

The two concepts that worked to guide the framework of the study were the LMX theory and the path-goal theory. Application of the LMX theory in the qualitative study assisted in obtaining a better understanding of why leaders fail to successfully engage employees (Lloyd et al., 2017). A common theme that emerged from the application of the LMX theory was the lack of available information regarding employee engagement (Lloyd et al., 2017). The second theory that guided this qualitative case study was the path-goal theory. Application of the path-goal theory provided insight into the tactic's leadership can utilize to successfully engage employees from a motivational perspective (Famakin & Abisuga, 2016). Another theme that was present from the integration of the path-goal theory, were the challenges leadership faces when trying to engage employees (Famakin & Abisuga, 2016). Trends that emerged throughout the qualitative case study helped to obtain better insight into leader-to-employee engagement. Figure one below provides a visual aid for the LMX theory and the path-goal theory's relation to this study.

Figure 1 Relationship between Concepts



Summary of the Conceptual Framework

Utilization of the LMX theory within this qualitative study provided better insight into where leaders are failing to engage employees. The path-goal theory was used to obtain more information pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement. Both the LMX theory and the path-goal theory were utilized to address the concerns of the general and specific problems of the study.

Definition of Terms

Documentation: During this qualitative study, the process of documentation is obtaining information from the participants in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Dyadic relationship: For the purpose of this qualitative study, the dyadic relationship pertains to the interaction between leadership and the employee, in which the relationship can be based off different factors (Lee et al., 2019).

Employee engagement: For this qualitative case study, employee engagement refers to the level of intrinsic value established between leadership and their subordinates (Klein, 2018).

Employee engagement challenges: For this study, challenges facing employee engagement are ones that cause the rate of retained employees to decrease (Milliman et al., 2018).

Employee retention: For this qualitative case study, employee retention refers to the retention of current, desired employees (Klein, 2018).

Honesty: To ensure accuracy during the documentation process of this qualitative case study, participants were instructed to be truthful when responding to the research questions (Bell-Martin & Marston, 2019).

Employee Satisfaction: For the purpose of this qualitative study, employee satisfaction is the improved morale exhibited by the employee through engagement techniques by leadership (Tsourvakas & Yfantidou, 2018).

Nonprofit Organizations: Nonprofit, or not-for-profit, organizations are tax exempt by the federal government (ATD, 2017).

Qualifications: Creswell and Poth (2018) defined qualifications as respondents meeting the eligibility criteria for a study. To meet the qualifications for participation within this study, leaders must be employed by selected YMCAs or Salvation Army offices located within Ohio.

Researcher's Bias: Bias occurs when the researcher uses the information obtained to support the researcher's assumptions (Bell-Martin & Marston, 2019). For this qualitative case study, the researcher avoided skewing results from the targeted population to support the general and specific problems of the study. To ensure accuracy, the researcher must act with honesty, similar to the participants of the study.

Successful employee engagement: For the purpose of this study, successful employee engagement occurs when employees are involved in workplace decisions and committed to the organization (Stoyanova & Lliev, 2017).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Several assumptions were made within this qualitative study. Assumptions were deemed necessary because the researcher did not have all of the information regarding leaders working for selected YMCAs and Salvation Army offices in Ohio. Assumptions worked to hold the unknown constant during this study, which allowed for consistency. In addition to assumptions, this study was also affected by some limitations. Some limitation factors had a limiting effect for which the researcher did not have adequate controls. The final influencer on the study was the delimitations. Although the researcher desired to explore the problem in its entirety, defining the scope down to leaders working for selected Ohio YMCAs and Salvation Army offices was a necessity. Narrowing down the scope ensured the focus of the research did not move beyond the specific study of leader-to-employee engagement within the selected Ohio nonprofits. This section outlines the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations that were applied to this qualitative study.

Assumptions

The first assumption of this qualitative study was that leaders working for Ohio YMCAs and Salvation Army offices would be able to articulate their level of knowledge regarding employee engagement. Appropriate safeguards were integrated to assure privacy and comfortability of each participant (Williamson & Burns, 2014). Safety measures for the study included receiving IRB approval, and interviewing each participant one-on-one to ensure comfortability (Williamson & Burns, 2014). Interviews were also conducted behind closed doors to ensure the participant felt comfortable in being honest with their responses. Risks of the assumption could include dishonesty in participant response. Subsequently, results could be skewed, and information obtained would not effectively contribute to the current scholarly, literature related to leader-to-employee engagement. To mitigate this risk, the questions were simple and did not include more than one layer of content per question. Questions asked to each participant are on the interview guide located in the appendix of the study. Mitigating the risk made it easier for the participant to avoid any misappropriation of questions being asked.

The second assumption was that leaders working for selected Ohio YMCAs and Salvation Army offices had similar duties in relation to leadership. The risk in this assumption was if participants did not work in formal leadership positions for the selected Ohio YMCAs or Salvation Army offices, then results would be skewed and negatively impact the information obtained. To mitigate this risk, participant qualifications were added for inclusion in the study (Williamson & Burns, 2014). Participants consented to being over the age of 18 and working in formal leadership positions for the selected YMCAs or Salvation Army offices located in Ohio. Located in the appendix section of the paper is the consent form, which each participant received and signed confirming they met the criteria for eligibility in the study.

The third assumption was the researcher conducted the study with minimum personal bias. The risk in this assumption is if the researcher was unable to avoid personal bias, then information obtained would be skewed to support the assumptions of the study. Personal bias directly impacts the reliability and validity of the study (Robson & McCartan, 2016). To mitigate the risk of researcher bias, questions asked were limited to ones that were useful to the study. Questions were focused on the level of knowledge leadership had regarding employee engagement. Additionally, leading questions where anticipated responses are expected were avoided to avoid researcher's bias.

Limitations

The first limitation concerns the extent of generalizable information. The focus of the qualitative case study centered on Ohio YMCAs and Salvation Army organizations; thus, findings were limited to this population. Due to this limitation, results should not be used to generalize information pertaining to other nonprofit organizations outside of the selected population. Findings should not be projected beyond the scope of selected nonprofit organizations within Ohio. To mitigate this limitation, participants were chosen based on their ability to provide in-depth information regarding leader-to-employee engagement from their personal experiences. One of the sampling methods selected for the study was a purposive approach. Purposive sampling facilitated obtaining in-depth information from the target population (Suen et al., 2014). A purposive approach to sampling was utilized to select participants that could use their experiences within a leadership role to provide an abundance of information regarding leader-to-employee engagement.

Another limitation was the accessibility of participants. Time constraints of the participants limited the number of interviews that could be conducted. To mitigate this limitation, one of the two sampling methods chosen focused on selecting participants who were more easily accessible to the researcher. Convenience sampling is a type of non-probabilistic sampling in which people are sampled because they are easier sources of data for researchers to access (Suen et al., 2017). The convenience approach to sampling was selected to assist the researcher in identifying participants more accessible to the researcher.

Delimitations

Obtaining information related to leader-to-employee engagement from selected Ohio nonprofits was the focus of the study. Examining the level of knowledge leaders working for the selected Ohio YMCAs and Salvation Army offices had regarding employee engagement was conducted by carrying out a qualitative case study. Skinner et al. (2018) noted a challenge facing Ohio nonprofits was the lack of available resources. To address this issue, the study also examined the impact available resources have on leadership's ability to efficiently engage employees. The qualitative study did not focus on the impacts corporate social responsibility strategies (CSR) have on employee engagement. Albdour and Altarawneh (2012) concluded CSR practices were not as highly adopted in businesses as other engagement techniques.

Significance of the Study

This qualitative study is significant because it worked to fill the gaps in knowledge pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement within selected YMCAs and Salvation Army offices. Afsar et al. (2017) determined that more knowledge about leader-to-employee engagement is required because of the vital role leadership plays in conducting collaborative tasks. This qualitative study is also significant because it advanced the knowledge within the cognate field of leadership. Prilipko (2019) concluded it is essential to educate leaders on effective employee engagement techniques to assist them in becoming more effective leaders.

Reduction of Gaps

Examining current literature revealed notable gaps with regards to the level of knowledge pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement. One of the gaps in information is whether leadership practices of employee engagement are sufficiently analyzed within the existing literature (Juan et al., 2018). Park (2017) claims lack of information can mean pivotal insight is unavailable to leaders. Similarly, Eldor and Harpaz (2016) favored a more in-depth research on the incentives regarding leader-to-employee engagement. This qualitative study examined the level of knowledge leaders working for selected YMCAs and Salvation Army offices had regarding employee engagement techniques. Application of the conceptual framework indicated a number of reasons for the limited use of employee engagement techniques by leadership working for selected Ohio YMCAs and Salvation Army offices.

Implications for Biblical Integration

This qualitative study integrated Biblical concepts and teachings related to the field of leadership. One Biblical concept found in the study of leader-to-employee engagement is the importance of commitment. Keller and Alsdorf (2012) discussed the importance the role of commitment plays both in worshipping God and in work. Scripture identifies the importance of commitment in numerous verses, including 1 Corinthians 15:58 which states, "Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (English Standard Version). The Biblical concept of commitment is linked to the focus of the study, which is leader-to-employee engagement. Eldor and Harpaz emphasized the importance of leadership's commitment to employee engagement, as this leads to an increase in employee satisfaction. Leaders working for selected Ohio YMCAs and Salvation Army offices can use findings in scripture regarding commitment to develop better employee engagement techniques.

A second Biblical concept within the qualitative case study was wisdom. Keller and Alsdorf (2012) emphasized the important role that wisdom has in navigating an individual’s life through Christ. Proverbs 3:13 states, "Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding" (English Standard Version). Understanding wisdom directly correlates with the focus of the study, which is leader-to-employee engagement. Prilipko (2019) emphasized the importance knowledge of employee engagement techniques are for leadership, as these are needed to achieve operational success. Leaders working for selected Ohio YMCAs and Salvation Army offices can continue to advance their knowledge regarding employee engagement to establish effective engagement strategies.

A major Biblical teaching that was embedded in the focus of this qualitative study is the ideology of not judging others. “Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you" (Luke 37:39, English Standard Version). Anand (2017) determined employee empowerment is a needed tool to successfully engage employees. God's teachings regarding the judgment of others are linked to leadership's ability to engage with employees through the use of employee empowerment techniques. Leaders working for selected Ohio YMCAs and Salvation Army offices can utilize God’s teaching on not judging others to develop stronger relationships with their employees.

Relationship to the Field of Study

This qualitative study sought to advance the current body of knowledge within the cognate field of leadership. Examining the relationship between leadership and their subordinates was important to understand, as Learmonth and Morrell (2017) concluded that leadership studies should include several varying perspectives regarding the relationship between workers and management. The need to expound upon the current body of knowledge regarding leader-to-employee relationships is supported by Park (2017) who determined future critical work regarding leadership would be better served to examine the relationship between leadership and all workers. A sentiment echoed by Collinson (2017), as more research is needed to add to the current body of knowledge regarding employee engagement. The need for more knowledge regarding employee engagement supported the necessity of this study.

This qualitative study is significant to the cognate field of leadership because it proposed the use of employee empowerment to effectively engage employees. Prathiba (2016) concluded employee empowerment is a valuable tool for leadership to use to establish strong employee engagement. Natrajan et al. (2019) found that improved job performance is linked to leadership's ability to empower employees through engagement techniques. Findings from these studies showed a direct correlation between this qualitative case study and the field of leadership.

Also examined in the study were concepts that are applicable to the field of leadership. One leadership concept utilized in the study was the LMX theory, which was one of the theories guiding the framework for qualitative study. Little et al. (2016) also determined the LMX theory greatly impacts the field of leadership due to the many leadership studies the LMX theory was used in. Many researchers including Lloyd et al. (2017) and Valle et al. (2019) used the LMX theory as a guiding theory for their examination into leadership studies. Leadership's ability to engage with employees through the LMX theory can improve an organization's operations (Lee et al., 2019). The LMX theory, a guiding theory for the study, is an integral concept within the field of leadership.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature Outline

The research study examined leader-to-employee engagement in selected YMCAs and Salvation Army offices in Ohio. The literature review was inspired by the role employee engagement plays in the YMCA and Salvation Army offices when carrying out services to their surrounding communities. According to Sanchez (2017), the YMCA recognizes employee engagement as critical in order for nonprofits to reach their full potential. Peddle (2018) noted

Salvation Army employees must be engaged by leadership to ensure each has the training and tools needed to engage the community.

YMCAs selected for this qualitative study included Massillon, Towpath Trail, and Tuscarawas County. The Salvation Army offices selected are the ones located in Massillon, Canton, and Akron Ohio. Geographic proximity was one of the influencers for the selected organizations. Geographic proximity allowed accessibility of information ideal for each of the six offices. Additionally, three YMCAs and three Salvation Army offices were chosen to gain more insight into leader-to-employee engagement, and to address the research questions. By gathering more data, the study took an in-depth look into leader-to-employee engagement in the selected YMCAs and Salvation Army offices.

The history of the YMCA and Salvation Army was examined to provide information pertaining to the development of these organizations, and also to demonstrate the important role successful collaboration efforts have for each organization. The second part of the literature review discusses guiding theories for the study. The theories that guided the study were the LMX theory and the path-goal theory. The third section of the literature review compared definitions pertaining to employee engagement and the four leadership styles found often in employee engagement studies. Transformational leadership, servant leadership, authentic leadership, and adaptive leadership are the four leadership styles examined in the study. Next, challenges that leaders face when trying to establish employee engagement are examined. Techniques needed to overcome such challenges are then discussed. Finally, the impacts of successful leader-to-employee engagement are discussed. The literature concludes with a summary of the review and a transitional paragraph into section two.

History of the YMCA

The YMCA has been a long-standing organization with an extensive history. YMCA stands for Young Men's Christian Association. From the start, the YMCA wanted to create a social change and meet the needs of the community (YMCA, 2020). The YMCA was founded by George Williams in 1844, emphasis has been placed on instilling Christian principles (YMCA, 2020). Since the opening of the first YMCA in 1844, the YMCA has expanded into 10,000 communities across the USA (YMCA, 2020). The mission of the YMCA is to develop strong kids, strong families, and strong communities (YMCA, 2020).

Throughout its 160 plus year history, the YMCA has worked to influence social change (YMCA, 2020). During World War I, the YMCA collaborated with surrounding communities to set-up 4,000 YMCA huts for recreation and religious services (YMCA, 2020). Between 1955 and 1966 YMCA employees constructed a mentoring program known as, "Building for Brotherhood" to help strengthen the youth of America (YMCA, 2020). The YMCA has developed relief campaigns for traumatic events such as 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, the earthquake in Haiti, and others (YMCA, 2020). This is just a short summary of some of the many achievements of the YMCA.

From its opening in 1844, the YMCA now serves more than 45 million people in 119 countries (Organizational Profile, 2020). The YMCA has become the leading nonprofit organization for youth development and social responsibility (Organizational Profile, 2020). The history of the YMCA reveals a number of successes relevant to delivering quality services. There are 162 YMCAs in Ohio, but for geographic reasons and Covid-19 travel restrictions there were three YMCAs examined in the study. The three Ohio YMCAs examined for the study were the Massillon YMCA, the Towpath Trail YMCA, and the Tuscarawas County YMCA.

Massillon YMCA

In 1923, the city of Massillon, Ohio started a capital campaign to fund the opening of a YMCA (Massillon YMCA, 2020). The capital campaign helped the city of Massillon raise 300,000 dollars in just 10 months (Massillon YMCA, 2020). Such a feat fosters the community's desire to procure a YMCA. The Massillon YMCA has a rich history of accomplishing social change. Notable accomplishments include providing relief funds during World War II, organizing fundraisers for memorials, and providing financial aid to YMCA members in need of food and medical assistance (Massillon YMCA, 2020). The Massillon YMCA continues to push for social change by working to support the surrounding community (Massillon YMCA, 2020).

Towpath Trail YMCA

Towpath Trail YMCA is the newest facility of the three YMCAs examined in the study. Although the Towpath Trail YMCA is newer, it has organized many efforts to support its surrounding community. The Towpath Trail YMCA opened its doors in 2006 in Navarre, Ohio (Towpath Trail YMCA, 2020). Since its opening in 2006, the Towpath Trail YMCA has organized a number of community fundraising events. The fundraising events include raising money for sick community members that are unable to afford healthcare, providing a five-star state rated childcare program for Navarre community members, among other contributions to the community (Towpath Trail YMCA, 2020). The goal of the Towpath Trail YMCA is to align with the governing body of the YMCA’s mission, which is to build strong kids, strong families, and strong communities (Towpath Trail YMCA, 2020).

Tuscarawas County YMCA

The Tuscarawas County YMCA opened its doors in 1919 (Tuscarawas County YMCA, 2020). Since its opening, the Tuscarawas County YMCA has worked to provide quality service for its surrounding communities (Tuscarawas County YMCA, 2020). The primary focus of the services offered by the Tuscarawas County YMCA have been to provide a place where community members can come and worship God while being able to socialize and feel comfortable (Tuscarawas County YMCA, 2020). Even in the 1930s the Tuscarawas County YMCA was ahead of its time by providing a place for community members to swim and also worship (Tuscarawas County YMCA, 2020). The focus on quality service continued, and in the 1960s the Tuscarawas County YMCA turned its focus toward youth mentoring and psychological empowerment (Tuscarawas County YMCA, 2020). Focus of psychological empowerment continues to this day and is instilled in all of the Tuscarawas County YMCA programs (Tuscarawas County YMCA, 2020).

Interview Structure for the Study

The objective of the study was to attain research on how leaders working for the YMCA can develop strategies to best engage employees. To obtain this objective, participants for the study had to work in a formal leadership position. Three team members from each facility were interviewed to gain a more in-depth understanding of employee engagement. A total of nine YMCA leaders were interviewed for the study. Interviews were conducted onsite and utilized a semi-structured interview approach. The questions posed to the participants are on the interview guide located in the appendix.

History of the Salvation Army

Similar to the YMCA, the Salvation Army also has over a 100-year rich history. The Salvation Army was formed in 1852, with the focus of trying to spread Christian principles (Salvation Army, 2020). William Booth was the leader of the group, and he walked the streets spreading the gospel (Salvation Army, 2020). The title, “Salvation Army” was first termed in

1878 by William Booth when he was reading a print proof of the Christian mission for the group (Salvation Army, 2020). From this point onward, the group became soldiers of Christ (Salvation Army, 2020). The group launched an offensive on the British Isles, and as a result they were able to convert 250,000 people to Christianity between 1881 and 1885 (Salvation Army, 2020). The message continued to spread worldwide, and as of today there are Salvation Army offices located in over 100 countries (Salvation Army, 2020).

Today, the Salvation Army is a leading non-profit in providing food and clothing for those in need (Salvation Army, 2020). The mission of the Salvation Army continues to be preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Salvation Army, 2020). The Salvation Army does not discriminate and works to provide service to everyone (Salvation Army, 2020). Salvation Army team members continue to work to raise food, clothing, and money for those in need (Salvation Army, 2020).

The Salvation Army has been in Ohio for over 100 years (Salvation Army, 2020). The Salvation Army office of Central Ohio first opened its doors in 1885 (Salvation Army, 2020). Since opening in Ohio in 1885, the Salvation Army has continued to expand all over Ohio. Due travel restrictions from Covid-19, the three Salvation Army offices are within 25 miles of each other. Salvation Army offices examined for this qualitative case study were the Massillon office, the Canton office, and the Akron office.

Interview Structure for the Study

Similar procedures were utilized to interview participants at the Salvation Army offices that were conducted at the YMCAs. Interviews were conducted onsite and utilized a semi-structured interview approach. The questions posed to the participants are on the interview guide located in the appendix. Participants at the Salvation Army offices worked in formal leadership positions. As the three offices examined for the study employee fewer than the Ohio headquarters in central Ohio, there was only one interview conducted at each office. There were three total interviews conducted at the Salvation Army offices. Interviews helped in obtaining data regarding leader-to-employee engagement in Ohio nonprofits.

Theories Guiding the Study

The LMX theory and the path-goal theory helped to gain a better understanding of the many factors that can impact leadership's level of knowledge regarding employee engagement. Similar to the studies by Lloyd et al. (2017) and Farhan (2018), the LMX theory and path-goal theory were the guiding theories for this qualitative study. Utilizing these theories assisted in obtaining information regarding employee engagement within the selected nonprofits. The purpose of this section of the literature review was to provide an overview of the theories applied in the study.

LMX Theory

Fred Dansereau, George Graen, and William Haga conceived of the LMX theory (Wang et al., 2016). Dansereau et al. (1973) suggested that the LMX theory goes through three stages, the role-taking stage, the role-making stage, and the role-routinization stage (Wang et al., 2016). During the role-taking stage, managers assess the skills of their new team members (Dansereau et al., 1973). Once skills are assessed team members begin working on their newly assigned projects, which is the role-making stage (Dansereau et al., 1973). Finally, during the role-routinization stage, group members and managers work to show their trust for each other (Dansereau et al., 1973). The stages of the LMX theory discussed by Dansereau et al. (1973) worked to examine the relationship between management and their employees.

The LMX theory initially centered on leader behavior, which was not enough to cover new avenues examined regarding leader and employee relationships (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The LMX theory has evolved into focusing on characteristics and behaviors between leaders and their members (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The LMX theory presents the relationship between leaders and the followers as a focal point of the leadership process (Northouse, 2019). Over the years, the LMX theory has continued to evolve to address the dyadic relationship between leadership and their employees (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

The LMX theory has been identified as a key determinant for successful working relationships between leadership and their employees (Nie & Lämsä, 2015). Improved relationships between leadership and their employees can lead to better business outcomes (Nie & Lämsä, 2015). The LMX theory examines the dyadic relationship between leadership and their team members (Bauer & Erdogan, 2015). The LMX theory asserts that leadership's effectiveness impacts team performance through the quality of the working relationships between management and their subordinates (Vugt, 2009). Examining the relationship between leadership and their subordinates is a major part of employee engagement, making the LMX theory an ideal guiding theory for this study.

Researchers such as Lloyd et al. (2017) and Valle et al. (2019) utilized the LMX theory as a guiding theory for their studies to obtain more knowledge regarding leader-to-employee relationships. The research teams were able to apply the LMX theory to identify gaps in knowledge and build upon the current information relating to leader-to-employee engagement. Identifying such gaps supported the focus of the study by addressing the qualitative research questions for this study. Using the LMX theory helped to obtain more information regarding techniques leadership can use to successfully engage employees.

Path-Goal Theory

Literature is ambiguous regarding who actually developed the path-goal theory, but it was modified by Robert House in 1971 (Murdoch, 2013). When House modified the path-goal theory, its primary focus was to identify leadership's most practiced styles of motivational techniques to encourage employees to accomplish their tasks (Murdoch, 2013). House (1996) reformulated the path-goal theory with a new focus on addressing the effects motivational leaders have on the level of their subordinates' work performance (House, 1996). House determined the theory must be reformulated due to the continuous changes in business development and organizational structure (Heeger, 2014).

Path-goal theory leadership styles are directive, supportive, participative, and achievement oriented (Northouse, 2019). Directive leaders clarify expectations and provide specific directions (Northouse, 2019). Supportive leaders strive to create a friendly climate to ensure subordinates feel more comfortable (Northouse, 2019). Participative leaders will solicit suggestions from subordinates to gain their confidence (Northouse, 2019). Finally, achievement-focused leaders set goal-oriented tasks for their subordinates to accomplish (Northouse, 2019).

The path-goal theory examines ways in which a leader can motivate their subordinates to accomplish tasks (Farhan, 2018). Leaders can use the four styles discussed by Northouse (2019) including directive, supportive, participative, and achievement oriented, to determine which method is the most effective for motivating employees. Leonard (2012) determined a pivotal portion of developing employee engagement is establishing strong motivational techniques. The path-goal theory supported the focus of the study by assisting in obtaining more information pertaining to employee engagement.

Antecedents of Employee Engagement

The ideology of achieving operational success through collaboration efforts is not new. Examining how employee engagement can be traced was the premier focus of this section. Extensive literature regarding employee engagement can be traced to Khan (1990), who focused on the psychological conditions of employee engagement (Dagher et al., 2015). Khan (1990) defined an engaged employee as one's preferred self in relation to the task at hand. This definition is similar to the psychological empowerment focus discussed by Sharma and Singh (2018). In the study conducted by Khan (1990), a link was identified between an engaged employee and psychological empowerment. A psychologically empowered employee is more likely to contribute and commit to the organization (Khan, 1990).

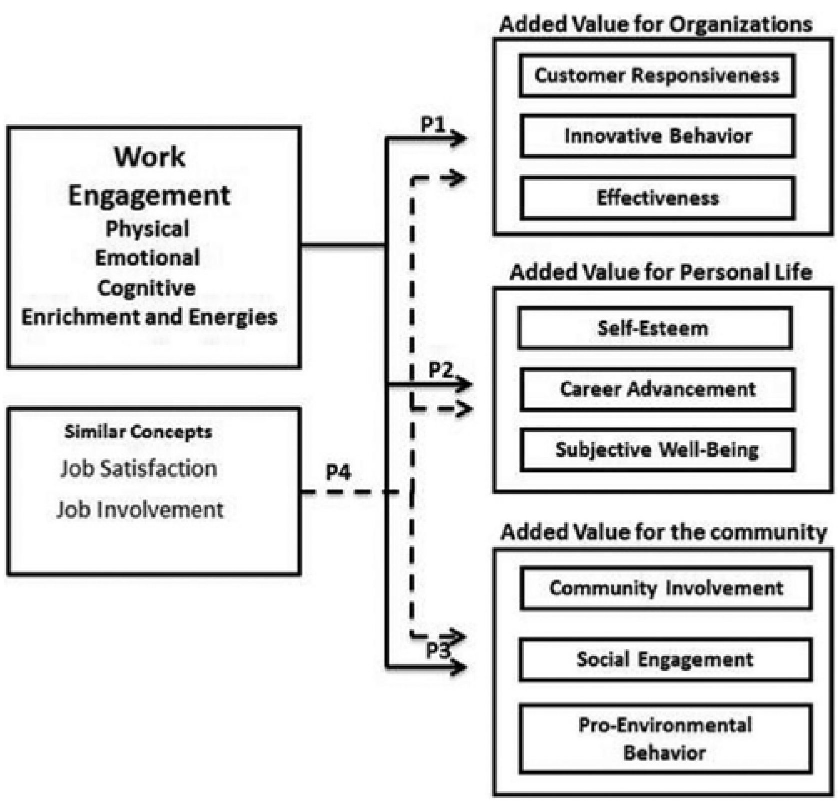
Dagher et al. (2015) determined before the concept of employee engagement was introduced in literature by Khan (1990), Bandura (1977) defined the theory of self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1977) the self-efficacy theory stated, "Psychological procedures alter one's level of strength" (p. 193). Similar to the studies today, major emphasis was placed on psychological empowerment. Bandura (1977) determined the four principal sources of self-efficacy are performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states. The four principles of self-efficacy work to show the hypothesized relationship between self-efficacy and behavioral change (Bandura, 1977).

Maslach et al. (2001) defined employee engagement as a positively motivated state of fulfillment. Maslach et al. (2001) presented a link between an employee's relationship with their work and employee burnout. If an employee has a positive relationship with their work, it is more likely that the employee will remain with the organization. It falls in leadership’s hands to motivate the employee in order to keep the relationship positive (Maslach et al., 2001).

Simpson (2009) examined the mediating role leadership's verbal communication plays in employee burnout. Similar to the study by Maslach et al. (2001), the major focus of the study was on the importance of keeping an employee's relationship with work positive. Simpson (2009) found support of verbal communication leads to an employee's improved job satisfaction. A consistent commonality in the literature that continues to occur is the importance of leadership improving an employee's perspective on work.

As employee engagement continues to evolve the avenues being studied continue to grow and change. Eldor (2016) conducted a research study to identify how employee engagement impacts the three major domains in a person's life. The three domains identified by Eldor (2016) are work, personal life, and community. Results from the study showed engaging employees is a multi-step process and can positively impact an individual's work-life (Eldor, 2016). Figure two works as a visual aid showing to present the findings from the study by Eldor (2016).

Figure 2 Eldor (2016) Employee Engagement



As employee engagement continues to evolve, the avenues being studied will continue to expand. The antecedents of employee engagement have led to a multitude of studies discussing employee engagement. The focus of the next section of the study is to examine how employee engagement has been defined in literature. The multitude of perspectives can reveal how employee engagement has changed since the term was coined in the scholarly literature by Khan (1990).

Defining Employee Engagement

A comprehensive study of literature shows a number of commonalities in characterizing leader-to-employee engagement. A common theme found in the literature pertinent to characterizing employee engagement was empowering employees. Researchers commonly characterized employee engagement as empowering employees through leadership (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017; Kang & Sung, 2017). A second commonality found in literature regarding the characterization of employee engagement was trust. Hanaysha (2016) characterized employee engagement as the development of trust and commitment between leadership and their subordinates. Establishing strong leader-to-employee engagement can provide an organization with a number of advantages.

Eldor and Vigoda-Gadot (2017) defined employee engagement as a state of mind characterized by vigor and fulfillment while exuding dedication towards the organization. They drew comparisons between employee engagement and psychological empowerment and concluded that employee engagement is distinct from psychological empowerment. The discussion of psychological empowerment and its relation to employee engagement varies between studies.

Sharma and Garg (2017) examined psychological empowerment and employee engagement from a different perspective and determined the former is a crucial driver for the latter. Sharma and Singh (2018) defined psychological empowerment as an antecedent of employee engagement. Both research teams identified a positive link between psychological empowering employees and strong employee engagement.

Rebull (2019) defined employee engagement as a technique used by leadership to incorporate methods to better motivate employees. Motivation has been deemed an important component of employee engagement by many researchers including Delaney and Royal (2017). Rebull (2019) found motivating an employee makes it easier to break down barriers and engage the employee. Tucker (2017) examined the roles of management when trying to engage employees.

Tucker (2017) found leaders that are involved with their team are more able to engage employees. Tucker (2017) determined an effective method for breaking down barriers to better engage employees is through improving the satisfaction of employees. In the workplace, employees may resist engagement and management must break down such barriers of resistance (Tucker, 2017). Breaking down barriers of resistance can assist an organization in achieving employee engagement goals.

Eldor and Harpaz (2016) defined employee engagement as an action taken by leadership to assist employees in gaining a better understanding of the organizational climate. Whereas Sharma and Singh (2018) determined psychological empowerment is an antecedent of employee engagement, Eldor and Harpaz (2016) proposed knowledge sharing is an antecedent of employee engagement. Both research teams revealed a link between employee engagement and improved employee satisfaction.

Summary of Employee Engagement

Employee engagement has been defined in numerous ways throughout the relevant literature. Eldor and Vigoda-Gadot (2017) defined employee engagement as a state of mind characterized by vigor and fulfillment, whereas Rebull (2019) viewed employee engagement as a technique used to motivate employees. Regardless of how employee engagement is defined in literature, there appears to be overwhelming evidence supporting the positive impact strong employee engagement can have on an organization. A pivotal facet in achieving strong employee engagement is strong leadership (Yao et al., 2017). The next section of the literature review presents four leadership styles and their impacts on employee engagement.

Leadership Styles

As the competitive market continues to intensify, strong leadership becomes necessary for organizational success (Yao et al., 2017). Successfully engaging employees is a critical facet of strong leadership. Employees that are sufficiently engaged feel more satisfied and work more productively for the organization. This section of the literature review presents four leadership styles that can assist leaders in achieving employee engagement. The four leadership styles discussed are transformational leadership, servant leadership, authentic leadership, and adaptive leadership.

Transformational Leadership

Burns coined the term transformational leader in 1977 in his Opus Magnum (Antonakis, 2014). Burns determined transformational leaders strive to motivate employees. Bass (1985) built on Burns’ definition by suggesting transformational leaders should be measured in terms of the influence they have on their followers. Bass is credited with developing the transformational leadership theory, which has been defined in various ways in literature (Antonakis, 2014).

Sahu et al. (2018) determined the most effective leadership style for improving an employee’s level of satisfaction and trust, while growing the organization’s culture, is the transformational leadership style. Transformational leaders work to empower their followers (Northouse, 2019). Empowering employees is essential for increasing the employee’s level of satisfaction (Eisenberger et al., 2016). Ukil (2016) claimed improved employee satisfaction is a contributor to developing employee engagement. Through utilizing empowerment techniques to increase an employee’s level of satisfaction, transformational leaders are able to better engage employees (Mozammel & Haan, 2016). Literature shows a number of ways that transformational leadership impacts the success of engaging employees (Balwant et al., 2019).

Balwant et al. (2019) identified the transformational leadership style as being a necessary leadership style for developing employee engagement. Transformational leaders trust employees to make decisions (Balwant et al., 2019). Employees that feel leadership trusts them may be more likely to commit to the organization and engage with leadership (Balwant et al., 2019). Trust is a major contributor for developing leader-to-employee engagement (Holland et al., 2017). High levels of trust between leadership and employees will also enhance employee job satisfaction (Holland et al., 2017).

Adamy et al. (2018) determined transformational leaders are most effective in engaging employees due to their ability to improve the employee’s level of satisfaction. Sharma and Garg (2017) determined employee satisfaction plays a pivotal role in developing employee engagement. To ensure employee satisfaction, leadership must empower employees and establish a high level of trust (Sharma & Garg, 2017). Executing transformational leadership creates a sense of involvement for employees, which is necessary to establish organizational commitment (Balwant et al., 2018).

Afsar et al. (2017) determined transformational leadership is an effective method for overcoming challenges facing employee engagement. A potential challenge facing employee engagement is motivating employees. Rebull (2019) found leadership must keep employees motivated in order to overcome employee disengagement. Motivated employees are more likely to commit to the organization (Rebull, 2019). Leaders working for YMCAs and Salvation Army offices in Ohio can utilize a transformational leadership style to continue to build upon their ability to motivate an employee to develop stronger employee engagement techniques.

Servant Leadership

Robert Greenleaf coined the term servant leadership in 1977 and defined a servant leader as one who serves first (Matteson & Irving, 2006). The ideology of servant leadership can be dated back much further to biblical times (Keller & Alsdorf, 2012). Jesus was the ultimate servant leader, as he washed the feet of his disciples (Keller & Alsdorf, 2012). Jesus' teachings of being a servant first align with Greenleaf's definition of the term. Greenleaf asserted servant leaders focus on the needs of their followers before their own (Matteson & Irving, 2006).

Letizia (2014) determined servant leaders must not only prioritize the welfare of their employees, but also search for justice for their employees as well. This definition is a more radical approach to servant leadership compared to Greenleaf's emphasis of focusing on the needs of the followers first (Matteson & Irving, 2006). Justice for followers means servant leaders must not only prioritize the concerns of their employees but also focus on finding an option that provides optimal welfare for the employees (Letizia, 2014). Regardless of the way servant leadership is defined, servant leadership has been shown to have many positive impacts in literature.

Khan et al. (2015) determined servant leadership has many positive impacts on an organization, including workplace spirituality. The improved spirituality leads to an improved organizational culture. Servant leadership also improves the meaningfulness of an employee's work, sense of commitment, and alignment with organizational values (Khan et al., 2015). From an organizational perspective, servant leadership leads to more empowerment and innovation, stronger employee orientation, and better capabilities for development.

Leaders of service industries, such as the YMCAs and Salvation Army offices, utilize a serve first leadership style to engage employees (ATD, 2017). The serve first leadership style is known as servant leadership, and literature reveals a number of advantages of using a servant leadership approach to engage employees (Dean, 2016). Muller et al. (2019) found leaders utilizing a servant leadership style are effective in developing employee engagement. Servant leaders prioritize the concerns of the employees first (Northouse, 2019). Addressing the concerns of the employees first helps to increase the employee's level of satisfaction (Madan, 2015). Employees satisfied with their work life are more likely to engage with leadership (Sharma & Garg, 2017). Cronley and Kim (2014) found that leaders working for Salvation Army offices were effective at utilizing a servant leadership style to engage employees.

Kaur (2018) determined servant leadership is the most effective leadership style in developing employee engagement, due to its emphasis on employee empowerment. Servant leaders empower employees by putting the concerns of team members first, which helps to develop employee commitment. Empowered employees are more committed to the organization because they feel valued by leadership. Leadership's ability to demonstrate awareness of the employee’s concerns is a quality that can be used to improve the process of carrying out collaborative tasks (Northouse, 2019). Processes of carrying out collaborative tasks are improved because there is more trust and value established between leaders and their employees (Kaur, 2018). Organizations will operate more efficiently with a high level of trust between leaders and their employees.

Authentic Leadership

An integral part of employee engagement is carrying out collaborative tasks (Lyubovnikova et al., 2017). Organizations that carry out collaborative tasks successfully are gaining a competitive advantage over ones that are not. Lyubovnikova et al. (2017) determined the authentic leadership style is most effective in improving an organization's ability to carry out collaborative tasks. Authentic leaders have a clear goal regarding the direction in which they desire to head (Northouse, 2019). Clearly defining goals and values helps employees to develop interpersonal relationships more easily with leadership (Lyubovnikova et al., 2017). Establishing interpersonal relationship supports development of employee engagement to facilitate the process of carrying out collaborative tasks.

Alilyyani et al. (2018) determined authentic leaders are most effective in developing employee engagement due to their ability to provide needed knowledge on a topic. Employees are more likely to follow and trust a leader that has a clear compass and a strong understanding of the subject at hand (Northouse, 2019). Confidence exhibited by leadership will motivate employees to follow their leaders. Confidence and trust are two imperative characteristics to develop leader-to-employee engagement (Hanaysha, 2016).

A goal for any organization is to improve its operational efficiency by carrying out collaborative tasks more effectively (Banks et al., 2016). Banks et al. (2016) found with regard to carrying out collaborative tasks, authentic leadership is more effective than transformational leadership. Authentic leaders clearly define their strengths and goals. By doing so, employees are better able to assist leadership during the collaborative task process since what is available and what is missing are clearly defined. Leaders of selected YMCAs and Salvation Armies can utilize this information regarding authentic leadership to ensure employees fully understand their leader's strengths and goals. Thus, employee engagement will be more easily obtainable.

Adaptive Leadership

In the competitive market, a valuable tool for leadership is to be able to adapt to impending challenges (Rumelt, 2011). Adapting to challenges requires leadership to identify strengths and limitations within the organization. Adaptive leadership is effective in achieving successful employee engagement as a leader using this style approaches each employee as an individual (Govindarajan, 2016). Each employee will respond to an issue or challenge differently, so it is important for leadership to be adaptive and handle every situation accordingly (Northouse, 2019). An adaptive leader will help employees solve their issues, which presents similarities to servant leadership (Northouse, 2019). In regard to carrying out collaborative tasks and adapting to challenges that come with employee engagement, an adaptive leadership style is one of the effective methods (Govindarajan, 2016).

During collaboration efforts, there will be complexities and challenges that need to be addressed. The most effective leadership style to address complexities and challenges is the adaptive leadership style (Nelson & Squires, 2017). Addressing complexities and challenges that come with carrying out collaborative tasks will ease the process of obtaining leader-to-employee engagement. A major complexity in establishing employee engagement is the various perspectives of employees. Each employee will respond differently to engagement efforts, making it important for leadership to facilitate the most efficient method to carry out the collaborative task (Nelson & Squires, 2017).

Organizational environments will continue to change as technology advances. Preece (2016) determined an adaptive leadership style is the most effective approach for handling changes in the environment. Leadership's ability to handle such changes in the environment will help secure trust from their employees, which will ease the process of establishing employee engagement. Establishing leader-to-employee engagement can be challenging, especially in a changing environment. An adaptive leader will be able to address the complexities related to the changing environment and continue the process of carrying out collaborative tasks efficiently (Preece, 2016).

Table 1 Leadership Style Comparisons

The four leadership styles discussed, transformational leadership, servant leadership, authentic leadership, and adaptive leadership, each support the process of employee engagement in different ways. Visual support for the benefits of each leadership style as to how they foster achieving leader-to-employee engagement is provided in the table Number? below. Comparisons between each style with regards to employee engagement and researcher assertions are also offered.

Researchers	**Leadership Styles**	**Impacts on Employee Engagement**
Sahu et al. (2018)	Transformational leadership	Transformational leaders are the best leaders to improve an employee’s level of satisfaction
Mozammel and Haan (2016)	Transformational leadership	Transformational leaders empower employees to aid the processes of employee engagement

Balwant et al. (2019)	Transformational leadership	Best leadership style to develop employee engagement through employee empowerment
Kaur (2018)	Servant leadership	Servant leaders are the best at developing trust with their employees
Muller et al. (2019)	Servant leadership	Best style to demonstrate to employees how much leadership values their subordinates
Dean (2016)	Servant leadership	Best leadership style to improve company culture
Lyubovnikova et al. (2017)	Authentic leadership	The best leadership to ensure collaborative tasks are carried out efficiently
Alilyyani et al. (2018)	Authentic leadership	The best leadership style to improve organizational productivity through the carrying out of collaborative tasks
Banks et al. (2016)	Authentic leadership	More effective than transformational leadership in ensuring collaborative tasks are carried out efficiently
Nelson and Squires (2017).	Adaptive leadership	Most effective handling in complexities with uncertainty in employee engagement
Govindarajan (2016)	Adaptive leadership	Handles engagement with each employee differently to address complexities with each employee
Preece (2016)	Adaptive leadership	Best style to utilize to adapt to the changing environment

Summary of Leadership Styles

Literature reveals a number of ways in which the four leadership styles of transformational leadership, servant leadership, authentic leadership, and adaptive leadership impact employee engagement (Preece, 2016). Each leadership style impacts employee engagement differently. Additionally, each leadership style offers a different strength for achieving employee engagement. Transformational leaders will work to empower employees, while servant leaders will emphasize serving employees first. Authentic leaders are effective in ensuring collaborative tasks are carried out, while adaptive leaders address the complexities of each situation differently. There still are a number of challenges leadership faces when trying to engage employees.

Challenges Facing Employee Engagement

The first challenge facing leadership is the need for more information regarding employee engagement (Park, 2017). Park (2017) suggested more emphasis be placed on studying employee engagement throughout an entire organization, not just of front-line workers and management. Research also demonstrated that leaders working for nonprofits face issues of insufficient available resources (Bouek, 2018). This section of the literature review discusses the gaps in information regarding employee engagement as well as the issue of insufficient resource availability.

Gaps in Information Available

Current literature offers adequate support for defining employee engagement, but Ruck and Menara (2017) determined literature has gaps in information regarding the importance of ensuring employees have a voice within the organization. Employees without a voice are less likely to commit to the organization (Hanaysha, 2016). Employees desire to be heard and they are more likely to commit to an organization if complaints are heard (Ruck & Menara, 2017). By providing the employee with a voice, they will feel more valued within the organization and leadership will be able to successfully engage the employee (Ruck & Menara, 2017).

Park (2017) determined there is a lack of contemporary research that examines the relationship between subordinates and leadership. Park (2017) argued more research is needed to address the relationship between leaders and all types of subordinates, not just with frontline workers. Leaders must have the knowledge to engage employees of all positions (Park, 2017). Additionally, Park (2017) noted more emphasis needs to be placed on the incentives that come with efficiently engaging employees. A study showing the incentives that come with effectively engaging employees can be beneficial in motivating leaders to engage employees.

Another gap in literature regarding leader-to-employee engagement is the lack of studies covering the link between employee satisfaction and employee engagement (Owusu-Ansah, 2018). Owusu-Ansah (2018) conducted a study in Columbus, Ohio and findings revealed more knowledge must be obtained regarding the link between employee satisfaction and employee engagement. Many researchers, including Madan (2015), noted the important role employee satisfaction has on achieving efficient leader-to-employee engagement. Owusu-Ansah (2018) emphasized future studies should work to identify what characteristics and techniques go into developing satisfaction for the employees.

A fourth gap in information regarding employee engagement is the way in which successful leader-to-employee engagement is measured in literature (Borah & Barua, 2018). Borah and Barua (2018) determined each organization measured the success of leader-to-employee engagement in a different way. Some organizations measure success based on the overall effectiveness of operations, whereas some may measure success based upon the level of employee satisfaction. Regardless of how success is measured, literature is very ambiguous in the way successes of employee engagements are defined (Borah & Barua, 2018). Future literature should examine how successes have been measured and also compare which techniques contribute to the successful engagement of employees (Borah & Barua, 2018).

A fifth gap in the literature regarding employee engagement is the most effective motivational method to establish employee engagement (Delaney & Royal, 2017). Delaney and Royal (2017) recommended studies be conducted to identify the various motivational techniques leaders adopt to successfully engage employees. Future researchers need to analyze which methods of motivation are successful, and which fail to motivate employees to efficiently engage with leadership (Delaney & Royal, 2017).

Chowdhury (2019) emphasized a more in-depth approach to employee engagement must be examined. A more in-depth approach would allow for a wider bandwidth of employee engagement to be examined (Chowdhury, 2019). The in-depth approach to employee engagement should examine incentives, challenges, techniques needed, and other facets of employee engagement (Chowdhury, 2019). This study used a semi-structured interview process to obtain information regarding employee engagement from the selected leaders of the Ohio YMCAs and Salvation Army offices. The qualitative case study used in this approach assisted in addressing the concerns presented by Chowdhury (2019) to take an in-depth approach to examining leader-to-employee engagement.

A gap in the current research regarding employee engagement is the best approaches to engage high-level teams (Howley et al., 2019). Howley et al. (2019) conducted a study on a group of leaders within Cincinnati, Ohio. Instructional leadership and its effectiveness in developing employee engagement were the study's main focus. From the study, Howley et al. (2019) determined leaders within the Ohio participant group needed a better understanding of the methodology required to engage high-level teams. Engaging high-level teams means leadership must ensure each team has the training and information it needs to provide a high-quality service. For service industries, like the YMCA and the Salvation Army, it is important for leadership to engage their teams to ensure the organization is providing a high-quality service.

Literature reveals a number of gaps in information pertaining to employee engagement (Park, 2017). Gaps in literature regarding employee engagement make it challenging for leaders to gain a better understanding of employee engagement. Gaps in literature are only one of the challenges leaders of YMCAs and Salvation Army offices face when trying to develop employee engagement. The other challenge leadership faces when trying to engage employees is the availability of resources (Skinner, 2017).

Resources

Skinner (2017) noted a challenge facing nonprofits is the availability of resources. Numerous researchers, including Bakker (2017), identified availability of resources as one of the most valuable tools for leadership to utilize to successfully engage employees. Nonprofits are tasked with trying to better serve their surrounding communities with fewer available resources (Cronley & Kim, 2014). Establishing strong leader-to-employee engagement to best serve the community is more challenging with fewer resources available.

Bouek (2018) asserted nonprofit organizations are continuously facing the decline of resource and capital availability when making business decisions. The shortage of capital and other valuable resources makes it challenging for nonprofit organizations to allocate the resources needed to engage employees most effectively. Nonprofit organizations are facing the challenges of needing more resources to train leadership to engage high-level teams. The first priority of a nonprofit is to serve its mission and with limited resources available, effectively engaging teams with insufficient resources for success (Bouek, 2018).

Laurett and Ferreira (2018) determined the resource shortage nonprofits face is due to the increased level of competing nonprofits. There is only so much capital to be spread around and with more potential nonprofits seeking and competing for money, individual organizations are receiving less (Laurett & Ferreira, 2018). Similar to the findings by Bouek (2018), Laurett and Ferreira (2018) felt with less capital available to disperse, nonprofit organization are going to allocate the funds and resources to the department that best supports their mission.

Summary of Employee Engagement Challenges

Major challenges facing leaders in developing employee engagement include gaps in research regarding employee engagement and resource availability (Park, 2017). Chowdhury (2019) proposed more knowledge be available for leaders wishing to employ a deeper approach to employee engagement. An in-depth approach would allow leadership to obtain a more thorough understanding of leader-to-employee engagement. In addition to more available knowledge regarding employee engagement, nonprofit leadership faces the challenge of resource availability (Skinner, 2017). As the competitive market continues to expand, nonprofits face pressures to provide service to clients with fewer resources available (Smith, 2018). Addressing such challenges is complicated, but research shows a number of contributors that can assist in establishing leader-to-employee engagement (Lück & Leyh, 2017).

Techniques Needed to Develop Employee Engagement

Human service organizations are facing growing pressures to provide services to more clients with fewer available resources (Smith, 2018). To address the issue of having fewer available resources, leaders must maximize their ability to engage employees (Osbourne & Hammond, 2017). Engaging employees allows leaders to ensure tasks are carried out at a higher level of quality (Muller et al., 2019). Researchers determined to engage employees, leaders must trust employees, provide employee support, and be successful in empowering them (Katz, 2009; Muller et al., 2019).

Trust and Employee Empowerment

Successful employee engagement from leadership goes beyond simple communication, rather a number of characteristics make up the techniques needed to establish leader-to-employee engagement (Osborne & Hammond, 2017). Leaders must be open with information, work conscientiously with employees, and allow for employees to be involved in workplace decisions. Involving employees during workplace decisions demonstrates organizational commitment from leadership. Leadership must demonstrate organizational commitment to employees by involving staff members in workplace decisions. By doing so, employees are better engaged and more likely to commit to the organization (Hanaysha, 2016). Commitment between leadership and their subordinates can help to develop a mutual feeling of trust.

Pass et al. (2019) built on the importance of commitment during employee engagement and found that trust and support are the two important characteristics of successfully engaging employees. Establishing trust allows employees to feel more valued within an organization. More committed employees facilitate an opportunity for the business to achieve greater success (Ramya & Ganta, 2016). Holland et al. (2017) expounded on the importance of trust by determining one of the most important characteristics of developing employee engagement is the establishment of certitude between leadership and employees.

Eldor and Vigoda-Gadot (2017) determined leadership must work to develop commitment from employees to establish employee engagement. Commitment from employees is developed from the psychological empowerment leadership has instilled within their subordinates. Kang and Sung (2017) characterized employee engagement as improved communication between leadership and their subordinates. Similar to the findings of Eldor and Vigoda-Gadot (2017), Kang and Sung (2017) found that increased communication emerges from the empowerment approaches leadership instilled within their employees.

Major contributors to an organization achieving improved operational success are employees (Osborne & Hammond, 2017). Leadership must recognize the value each employee has and work to better engage with staff. Eisenberger et al. (2016) concluded operational success is achieved through strong leader-to-employee engagement. Employees who feel valued by leadership are more likely to remain with an organization and also return to work from injuries in less time (Eisenberger et al., 2016). Antony (2018) found less absenteeism and enhanced employee loyalty in engaged employees. Dedicated and committed employees perform better than disengaged employees, thus improving an organization's operations (Antony, 2018).

Cronley and Kim (2014) conducted a study examining the role employee empowerment has in the Salvation Army Corporation. They also examined the role employee engagement played in improving an organization’s service quality. Findings revealed that more sufficient leader-to-employee engagement would lead to improved service quality. Improving upon the relationship between employees and leadership can help staff members feel more valued by the organization (Owusu-Ansah, 2018). If an employee feels more valued by an organization, they are more likely to commit to the company (Owusu-Ansah, 2018). Cronley and Kim (2014) claim establishing employee commitment is one technique that leaders of Salvation

Army offices are utilizing to engage employees to continuously improve the level of quality service provided. Empowering employees through active involvement techniques is a valuable tool that has been analyzed in other studies within Ohio, including one conducted by Katz (2009).

Katz (2009) conducted a study examining successful employee engagement techniques within selected Ohio businesses. The focus of the study was to determine if there was a link between empowering an employee and an employee committing to the organization. According to Katz (2009), employees that are empowered are more eager to work and more likely to commit to an organization. Leaders must identify which techniques are most effective in empowering employees (Madan, 2015). Two approaches for empowering employees are utilizing motivational tactics and providing support to the employees (Katz, 2009).

Motivation

Tsourvakas and Yfantidou (2018) determined a major advantage of leadership successfully engaging employees is improved motivation. Engaged and motivated employees will increase an organization's productivity levels. In the vastly competitive market, higher productivity levels are valuable in assisting an organization in achieving sustainability (Rumelt, 2011). Madan (2015) found motivated and engaged employees are more likely to develop intrinsic values with operational goals. Involved employees can have a greater zeal and help an organization operate more efficiently in the market.

Leonard (2012) conducted a study to examine the role motivation plays in engaging employees for nonprofit business leaders. Findings from the study showed nonprofit business leaders tend to be effective in keeping employees engaged by utilizing motivational techniques (Leonard, 2012). Leaders of nonprofits tend to not have as much financial flexibility as for-profit organizations (Bouek, 2018). To address the issue, leaders must maximize their ability to motivate employees (Klein, 2018). Keeping employees motivated ensures services are carried out more efficiently and tasks are accomplished with higher levels of quality (Klein, 2018).

Leaders of YMCAs and Salvation Army offices can utilize an organizational coaching approach as a motivational tool to engage employees. An organizational coach will help leaders identify the skills and capabilities needed to meet company expectations and carry out collaborative tasks (Bergquist & Mura, 2018). Working as an organizational coach, leaders can identify an employee’s skills and values. Leaders can use such knowledge to motivate employees (Ali et al., 2018). Ali et al. (2018) presented a link between leadership's ability to coach an employee and achieve successful leader-to-employee engagement. Successful organizational coaches are able to motivate employees, which enables them to connect with their members more readily.

DiGirolamo and Tkach (2019) determined there is a link between leadership's ability to coach an employee and the ability of a leader to achieve higher levels of employee engagement. Leaders utilizing organizational coaching techniques are able to develop more efficient team engagement, which contributes to better operational success through collaboration efforts (DiGirolamo & Tkach, 2019). Motivating an employee is only one facet of achieving effective employee engagement. In addition to motivating employees, leaders need to provide support for their team members (Madan, 2015). A valuable tool for engaging employees is for leadership to provide support to an employee, which can be accomplished by helping with their duties or providing words of encouragement (Madan, 2015).

Support

Digitalization has a greater impact on organizations than ever before, making it easier for employees to work from home and not have as much face-to-face interaction with leadership (Cortellazzo et al., 2019). In this digital era Sievert and Scholz (2017) emphasized the importance of leader-to-employee engagement as it is linked to an organization's competitiveness within the market. Competition continues to enhance as organizations are taking advantage of the technology available to them, but in this more disengaged world, employee engagement is a powerful tool that leadership can use to gain a better position in the market (Sievert & Scholz, 2017). Employee engagement will continue to become a more valuable tool as technology continues to grow and enhance. Eldor and Harpaz (2016) argued that adjusting to trends in the market, including technology changes, are more easily overcome with efficient leader-to-employee engagement. Trust and commitment between leadership and employees ensures information and knowledge are transferred within the organization faster and more efficiently, which allows a business to avoid unneeded halts in productivity (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016). Avoiding such unplanned stops in productivity allows an organization to increase its operational competitiveness.

The Association for Talent Development (ATD) (2017) conducted a study to examine what engagement techniques leaders of YMCAs are utilizing to effectively engage staff members. The study examined how most nonprofit employees, including those working for YMCAs, are away from their desk and responding to client needs throughout the day (ATD, 2017). Having employees away from their desk makes it more challenging for leadership to engage employees. Leaders of YMCAs are using a staff connect tool to efficiently engage employees. The staff connect tool is a combination of communication methods that focus on ensuring employees have the support they need to properly serve their clients. The support leadership provides through the connect tool are periodic check-ins with their employees, words of encouragement throughout the day, and other information that can better support their employees (ATD, 2017).

Madan (2015) determined leaders must take an active role in supporting their team members to engage employees most effectively. Leadership must take an active role in showing support for their employees (Madan, 2015). Showing support for employees can mean assisting with the employee's tasks or providing emotional support (Madan, 2015). Leaders of Salvation Army offices are effective at taking an active role in assisting their team members by providing the support needed to carry out services to the community (Cronley & Kim, 2014). Salvation Army offices are providing support by ensuring team members have the training and information they need to provide a high-quality service (Cronley & Kim, 2014). Providing support to team members shows that leaders value them (Madan, 2015).

Klein (2018) emphasized the importance of ensuring employees feel valued by leadership. Klein (2018) determined an effective way to support employees are to connect with them. Leadership can connect with employees by taking an active role in the employee's job responsibilities and offering words of support when needed. By leadership being actively involved with an employee, a team member is able to see that leadership values their contributions to the organization (Madan, 2015). Leadership's active involvement can help employees develop more value for an organization because of the value leadership has placed on them (Madan, 2015). Connecting and valuing employees is an effective tool for leadership to utilize to better support their team members (Klein, 2018).

A major component in supporting employees is for leadership to act with a serve first mentality (Muller et al., 2019). Integrating a serve first mentality allows employees to see that leadership values their contributions to the organization (Muller et al., 2019). Leaders working with a serve first mentality are providing an active support role in ensuring employees have everything they need to be successful (Muller et al., 2019). Dean (2016) determined the most effective approach for supporting employees is to utilize a servant leadership style.

Summary Leaders Establishing Employee Engagement

Research reveals that employee engagement leads to more motivated employees, better organizational commitment from the employees, and improved employee morale (Tsourvakas & Yfantidou, 2018). Leaders can utilize employee empowerment methods, motivational tactics, supportive approaches, and engaging employees to facilitate employee engagement. For long-term success, leadership must continue to develop best practices for engaging employees. Efficiently engaging employees can impact the success of an organization.

Impacts of Strong Leader-to-Employee Engagement

Literature illustrates a multitude of advantages that come with successful leader-to-employee engagement. Research shows that employee engagement leads to more motivated employees, better organizational commitment from the employees, and improved employee morale (Tsourvakas & Yfantidou (2018). By developing employee engagement, leadership is demonstrating the value each employee has within an organization. Supporting this demonstrated value, an organization is maximizing its internal resources to overcome changes in the competitive market (Sievert & Scholz, 2017).

Leadership must identify the major contributors in engaging their employees more effectively (Lück & Leyh, 2017). Major contributors to employee engagement are employee satisfaction and organizational culture (Sharma & Singh, 2018). Improving an employee's level of satisfaction will work to improve the company's culture, which makes it easier for leadership to engage their employees (Sharma & Singh, 2018). Sahu et al. (2018) determined the most effective leadership style to improve an employee's satisfaction level and grow the company's culture is a transformational leadership style. Research shows employee satisfaction, strong organizational culture, and transformational leadership significantly contribute to strong employee engagement (Sahu et al., 2018).

Employee Satisfaction

Employees are amongst the most valuable tools within an organization (Sharma & Garg, 2017). Employees work to provide the services an organization is offering. Sharma and Garg (2017) concluded the most practical application of employee engagement is to improve the satisfaction of employees. As noted by Leonard (2012), a method for improving an employee's level of satisfaction is to empower the employee. Psychologically empowering employees continues to be the most crucial driver in engaging employees and achieving operational success (Sharma & Garg, 2017). Antony (2018) determined if leadership focuses on empowering employees, then an employee's level of satisfaction will improve. This can make it easier for leadership to engage the employee. To empower an employee, leadership can provide positive words of encouragement (Antony, 2018).

Sharma and Singh (2018) supported the notion of empowering employees. Sharma and Singh (2018) found employees that are psychologically empowered through engagement techniques are more satisfied and more likely to help an organization achieve operational success. By psychologically empowering employees through engagement techniques, an organization creates an environment in which the employee feels more valued (Sharma & Singh, 2018). Leaders of YMCAs and Salvation Army offices within Ohio can utilize findings from Sharma and Singh (2018) to develop strategies to better empower their employees.

Another facet of employee satisfaction includes leaders demonstrating how much they value their employees (Eisenberger et al., 2016). Employees who feel valued by leadership are more likely to remain with an organization and also return to work from injuries in less time (Eisenberger et al., 2016). Leaders cannot afford to waste time retraining new employees due to higher turnover rates from not sufficiently engaging employees. Antony (2018) found that with high levels of employee satisfaction there will be less absenteeism and enhanced employee loyalty. If leaders focus on improving an employee's level of satisfaction the organizational culture will also improve.

Organizational Culture

Potnuru et al. (2019) determined a major contributor to leadership's ability to engage employees is an organization's culture. Improved organizational culture impacts all facets of the organization including an employee's level of satisfaction (Potnuru et al., 2019). Establishing strong company culture starts with leadership developing trust with their employees through engagement techniques. If leaders are able to develop techniques to encourage the trust of their employees, the organization's culture will improve (Antony, 2018). Improved company culture contributes to the quality of services being offered by an organization (Potnuru et al., 2019).

Ukil (2016) determined the company's level of organizational culture contributes to leadership's ability to engage their employees. Through a comprehensive study, Ukil (2016) found when the company is succeeding, and the employees are playing a role in the success, the culture of the company will continue to improve. In contrast, if the culture is low and employees are not engaged the business will not be able to achieve the levels of quality desired (Ukil, 2016).

Leaders of YMCAs and Salvation Army offices located in Ohio should place an emphasis on the organization's culture to support the process of engaging employees.

For leaders to improve their company culture, a high level of trust must be established between leadership and their subordinates (Holland et al., 2017). The establishment of trust between leaders and their subordinates will improve the organization's culture (Ukil, 2016). Holland et al. (2017) conducted a study to see the role trust plays in engaging employees. Results from the study revealed that the higher level of trust there is between employees and leadership, the more likely leadership will be able to engage employees (Holland et al., 2017). By understanding the important role trust plays in engaging employees, leaders can maximize this information to ensure high levels of trust are established within their organizations (Holland et al., 2017). Developing high levels of trust will help the organization improve in all facets (Sahu et al., 2018).

Summary of Impacts of Establishing Strong Leader-to-Employee Engagement

Leaders must identify the contributors needed to develop strong employee engagement (Sharma & Garg, 2017). Research revealed the major contributors to establishing leader-to-employee engagement are employee satisfaction and improved organizational culture (Rebull, 2019). Improving the company culture and an employee's level of satisfaction will help the organization to ascend to higher levels of success (Mozammel & Haan, 2016). By understanding the contributors to establishing employee engagement, leaders can better engage their employees (Sharma & Garg, 2017).

Summary of the Literature Review

The literature review was guided by the three research questions of the study. The research questions focused on what leaders of selected YMCAs and Salvation Army offices are doing to engage employees, the challenges leaders of selected YMCAs and Salvation Army offices face when trying to engage employees. The literature review provided a brief history of the two nonprofits selected, the YMCA and the Salvation Army. Additionally, the two theories guiding the study, the LMX theory and the path-goal theory, were analyzed. Both theories have shown to be strong theories in supporting the goals of obtaining more information regarding employee engagement in literature.

Next, the literature review examined employee engagement and compared how it has been defined in literature. Employee engagement has been defined from various perspectives in literature. Tucker (2017) defined employee engagement as breaking down the barriers of resistance to support employees in committing to the organization. Eldor and Harpaz (2016) defined employee engagement as the action by leadership of assisting employees to gain a better understanding of the organizational climate. Regardless of the way employee engagement has been defined, it has presented a direct link to better organizational success.

To better understand all facets of employee engagement, leadership styles were examined. This literature review examined four leadership styles and their effects on employee engagement. The four leadership styles examined were transformational, servant, authentic, and adaptive. Each leadership style revealed different strengths when aligned with employee engagement. Table one of this study compares the four leadership styles and how they impact employee engagement. There are challenges leadership faces when trying to develop employee engagement.

The major challenges facing leadership are the gaps in information regarding employee engagement, and the availability of resources (Park, 2017). Literature needs a more in-depth approach to studying employee engagement (Chowdhury, 2017). A more in-depth approach will allow a more thorough understanding of employee engagement, which can help to fill the gaps in information regarding employee engagement (Chowdhury, 2017). Nonprofit leaders also face the challenge of resource availability (Bouek, 2018). To address the concerns leadership face regarding employee engagement, leaders must recognize the contributors needed to better engage employees (Lück & Leyh, 2017).

Leaders must identify the techniques needed for engaging employees (Lück & Leyh, 2017). Engagement techniques discussed in this literature review were trust, employee empowerment, motivating employees, and providing support for employees. If leadership is able to utilize these techniques to successfully engage employees, the organization can hope to see positive impacts. Empowered employees are more satisfied with their job and more likely commit to the organization (Antony, 2018). Improved employee satisfaction can lead to improved organizational culture (Holland et al., 2017). The literature review has worked to fill gaps in information regarding employee engagement.

Transition and Summary of Section One

This qualitative case study examined the current level of knowledge regarding leader-to-employee engagement within selected YMCAs and Salvation Army offices in Ohio. Meng et al. (2017) and Park (2017) determined there is a need for more research regarding employee engagement. To contribute to the current body of knowledge, an examination of literature regarding leader-to-employee engagement within selected Ohio nonprofits was deemed necessary. Information was obtained through onsite semi-structured interviews with leaders working for selected YMCAs and Salvation Army offices. Information was also obtained through notes transcribed on the interview guide during the interview process. Knowledge obtained from this qualitative case study helped to gain a better understanding of the current level of knowledge regarding leader-to-employee engagement. Information gathered was used to address the issue regarding the need for more information pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement.

Section Two: The Project

This research study examined the level of knowledge related to employee engagement possessed by leaders who worked for selected nonprofits. Presented within this part of the research are the roles of the researcher and the participants in the study. Participants selected for the study were working in leadership positions for one of the selected nonprofit organizations. Data collected from the participants was organized and coded to identify commonalities. The coding processes that were used to identify the commonalities are presented. Reliability and validity measures were implemented to assist the process of developing trustworthy data. Finally, part two of the study concludes with a transitional summary leading into part three.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to contribute to the current literature regarding employee engagement by bridging the gap in research pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement within selected YMCAs and Salvation Army offices. Information obtained from the study was used to contribute to the current body of knowledge pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement. The problem regarding gaps in information relating to leader-to-employee engagement was explored through a qualitative case study. This qualitative case study examined leader-to-employee engagement within selected YMCAs and Salvation Army offices within Ohio.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher's role in this qualitative study was to collect data from multiple sources utilizing a semi-structured interview process (Rimando et al., 2015). Sample participants for this study were leaders working for the selected YMCAs and Salvation Army offices in Ohio. Selected YMCAs included the Massillon, Towpath Trail, and Tuscarawas. Sample participants interviewed were three leaders from each facility. Geographic proximity was one influencer for selecting the organizations. Geographic proximity allowed accessibility of information ideal for each of the three selected YMCA offices.

The selected Salvation Army offices are the Massillon, Canton, and Akron offices. Sample participants from the Salvation Army offices were one leader from each facility. Similar to the YMCA facilities, geographic proximities were one of the primary reasons for selecting the Massillon, Canton, and Akron Salvation Army offices. The Salvation Army offices selected were located within 25 miles of each other, which eased the process of conducting onsite semi-structured interviews. Once the participants were identified, they were contacted through scripted emails and telephone calls. The recruitment letters sent to each participant are located in the appendix section of this study.

Semi-Structured Interview Process

In this qualitative case study research study, the primary method for collecting data was through conducting semi-structured interviews with each participant (Rimando et al., 2015). Questions posed were open-ended to try and obtain in-depth data related to the topic from each participant (Rimando et al., 2015). Semi-structured interviews were conducted to modify the flow of the interview with each participant (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Questions that were posed to each participant are on the interview guide located in the appendix section of the paper. Additionally, to avoid bias, the researcher avoided asking leading questions where anticipated responses were expected. Questions asked were open-ended to obtain in-depth information and to avoid researcher bias.

The next task for the researcher was to collect and analyze data from the participants. Data obtained from the interviews were analyzed to determine if any themes were present. "Identifying themes from the study helps to ensure that people can learn from this case study themselves and apply learnings to a population of cases or transfer them to a similar context" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 206). Data was examined through two coding processes. The two coding processes used were open coding and axial coding. Justification for selecting open coding and axial coding is presented within the coding process section of the dissertation. The researcher kept a detailed log of the data collected to further examine potential trends and commonalities that were found.

The final role for the researcher was to present the date collected. A combination of visual aids, including tables and merits in literature, were used to provide support for the data collected. Visual aids highlighted the data collected to allow readers to more easily understand the information collected and analyzed (Verdinelli & Scagnoli, 2013). Additionally, the researcher presented key data collected that aligned with the research questions of the study. Presenting key data, along with visual aids, assisted the researcher in effectively presenting the data collected.

Participants

The participants selected for this study were three leaders from each of the Massillon, Towpath Trail, Tuscarawas YMCA in Ohio. The Salvation Army offices selected were the Massillon, Canton, and Akron Salvation Army offices in Ohio. The sample size for the selected Salvation Army offices included one leader from each facility. The six facilities were located within 25 miles of each other, which eased the process of conducting on-site interviews. To ensure human rights were protected and ethical procedures were established, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) had to approve the study. The IRB serves as an important role in protecting the rights and welfare of the human research subjects (FDA, 1998). After securing approval for the study, interviews were scheduled and conducted.

Establishing working relationships with the participants started with casual conversations and a discussion of expectations for the interview (Risan et al., 2018). Communicating expectations helped participants feel more comfortable during the interview process (Risan et al., 2018). This researcher worked to engage participants by being receptive of negative feelings from the interviewee. Participants felt more comfortable and were more cooperative when the interviewer utilized engagement techniques (Risan et al., 2018). To be receptive of any negative feelings, any questions or concerns the interviewee had regarding the interview process were addressed before the interview was conducted. If the participants had questions regarding the study, they were prompted to ask before the interview began. The researcher worked to actively engage the participants of the study to establish rapport with the interviewees. Rapport was established through casual conversation and the discussion of interview expectations. Establishing a solid rapport allows for necessary comfort throughout the interview process (Risan et al., 2018). Finally, each participant was informed that they could excuse themselves from the study at any point.

Ethical protection of the participants in this study was critical. The first step in ensuring each participant was ethically protected was receiving approval from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB works in compliance with FDA obligations to examine and ensure no facets of the study were in violation of human rights (FDA, 1998). The next step in ensuring the participants were ethically protected included the integration of appropriate safeguards. Taylor and Bodgan (2016) determined ethical issues can arise at any point during the study, and it is important to develop appropriate safeguards. The safeguards utilized for the study include the reduction of personal information, shredding the materials used for research after the required retention period, and ensuring the protection of data collected. To safeguard data transcripts, recordings, and material gathered, a computer that was password-protected was used to store the information.

Research Methodology and Design

A qualitative case study was selected to examine leader-to-employee engagement techniques within the Massillon, Towpath Trail, and Tuscarawas YMCA, as well as the Massillon, Canton, and Akron Salvation Army offices. The instrument used to collect and analyze data was a semi-structured interview process, during which an interview guide was used. Semi-structured interviews are commonly used in qualitative research to seek a deeper understanding of the human experience (Bearman, 2019). Semi-structured interviews allowed the opportunity to develop personalized open-ended questions based on participant response (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Interviews with each participant were conducted face-to-face. Instead of having the participant fill out the interview guide alone, questions were asked verbally to identify underlying nonverbal cues. This section provides justification for the chosen research method and research design.

Discussion of the Research Method

The research methodology selected for examining leader-to-employee engagement strategies in selected Ohio nonprofits was a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach involves gathering insight from the participant’s personal experiences (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Once data was collected from each leader’s personal experiences, information was analyzed for key points. The qualitative approach was utilized to turn the data collected from the selected participants into insightful information (Liamputtong, 2009). To collect data from the participants, the selected instrument of the qualitative approach was a semi-structured interview process. Robson and McCartan (2016) found a semi-structured interview process useful in obtaining in-depth information from participants when open-ended questions are posed. The interview guide for the study was developed with open-ended questions to gather more insight from each participant's personal experiences. Additionally, each participant was asked the same questions in order to gather a multitude of data. For this research study, a qualitative methodology was the appropriate selection because it facilitated the opportunity for more insight to be obtained from the selected participants regarding leader-to-employee engagement.

Discussion of the Research Design

Case study designs were utilized to help the researcher obtain a richer and deeper understanding of the topic being examined (Yin, 2014). The goal of using the case study approach in this research project was to help understand the problem being examined in its entirety (Yin, 2014). Data saturation refers to the point when signs of redundancy appear and no new themes are presented (Hennink et al., 2017). Creswell et al. (2007) determined a case study can be used to propose descriptive and probing questions to the participants of the study to gain a more thorough understanding of the research problem. The open-ended probing questions of the study provided the opportunity for each participant to explain their experiences with leader-to-employee engagement throughout their tenure as leaders. Once the information was collected from each participant, the case study approach was used to apply the findings from the interviews to the problem being studied. Case study research is a qualitative research method that applies the findings from the case to the problem being studied (Yin, 2014).

Summary of Research Method and Design

Qualitative studies are multi-method focused and continue to advance in literature as they are used to understand the meaning of the topics being examined (Robson & McCartan, 2016). A qualitative methodology allowed for more insight into leader-to-employee engagement to be obtained from participants. The qualitative research method uses a case study design to gather information and address the gaps in knowledge regarding leader-to-employee engagement. A case study approach has always been a prominent strategy used for the advancement of knowledge (Robson & McCartan, 2016). The chosen method and design were appropriately selected to examine the general problem of this study.

Population and Sampling

A sample is a subset of the population from which the data is drawn to represent the population (Etikan & Bala, 2017). Participants of the sample were three leaders from each of the Massillon, Towpath Trail, and Tuscarawas YMCAs, as well as one leader from each of the Massillon, Canton, and Akron Salvation Army offices. Selecting the most efficient sampling methods was imperative for collecting and analyzing data that is representative of an entire population (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Two sampling methods were used to infer information for the study. Sampling methods utilized in the study were the convenience method and the purposive method.

Discussion of the Population

The sample group should align with the problem being studied (Fink, 2017). This study sought to examine leader-to-employee engagement within selected Ohio nonprofits. To align with the problem of the study, the sample was comprised of three leaders from each of the Massillon, Towpath Trail, and Tuscarawas YMCAs, and one leader from each of the Massillon, Canton, and Akron Salvation Army offices. The sample selected was based on the sampling techniques of the convenience and purposive approaches. Through the two sampling methods selected, justification is presented for why these leaders were chosen. In addition to sampling techniques, there were established criteria for study eligibility. Inclusion criteria included working within a leadership role for one of the six selected organizations. Additionally, participants had to be over the age of 18 at the time of the study. Demographic variables of age, race, or sexuality were irrelevant to the study. Creating characteristic categories for each leader would not support the focus of the study, thus criteria were based upon participants' formal leadership position within the selected organizations.

Discussion of the Sampling Methods

Information obtained from the sampling methods used should be substantial enough to represent the population (Malterud et al., 2016). To fulfill the needs of the study, a non-probabilistic approach to sampling was chosen over a probabilistic approach to sampling. In a non-probabilistic sampling method, the researcher determines the choice population (Setia, 2017). Probability sampling does not provide the control needed, as population sampling utilizes some form of random selection (Setia, 2017). Once a non-probabilistic sampling method was selected, the next step was to identify which techniques of non-probabilistic sampling supported the focus of the study. Two techniques of the non-probabilistic approach used in the study were the convenience approach and the purposive approach.

Convenience sampling is a type of non-probabilistic sampling in which participants are selected due to ease of access (Suen et al., 2017). During the time of the study, a pandemic identified as Covid-19 transpired. Travel restrictions required that participants be located within an appropriate geographic proximity. Locations selected are all within 35 miles of each other in Ohio. In addition to addressing restricted travel due to Covid-19, the convenience technique for sampling eased the process of conducting interviews.

Participants within the selected area still needed to provide in-depth information regarding leader-to-employee engagement to meet the needs of the study. To identify participants that would help to address the focus of the study, the purposive approach to sampling was selected. Purposive sampling facilitated an opportunity to obtain in-depth information from the target population (Suen et al., 2014). Additionally, the purposive approach to sampling was used when the researcher wants to access a particular subset of the population. A purposive approach to sampling was utilized to select participants that could use their experiences within a leadership role to provide an abundance of information pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement. Leaders selected through the convenience and the purposive approaches to sampling made up the sample population of the study.

Discussion of the Sample Size

The sample size for the study was 12 leaders in total. Hennink et al. (2017) found data saturation is met with nine participants. Robson and McCartan (2016) noted participants selected for the sample must be representative of the population. If the members selected are not a good representation of the population, it is likely results will be skewed and the data will not reach saturation. Data saturation refers to the point where new information is no longer discovered and signs of redundancy appear (Hennink et al., 2017). Interviews were conducted until signs of redundancy appeared in the data and no new information was discovered. Each participant was asked the same questions during the interview process. Questions asked to each participant can be found on the interview guide located in the Appendix.

Summary of Population and Sampling

Sampling methods selected for the study were the convenience sampling method and the purposive sampling method. Utilizing the chosen sampling methods, a baseline of 12 leaders was selected for the study. Twelve participants facilitated the opportunity to gather more information from each of the participant's experiences within their leadership role. Obtaining more information from each participant provided the researcher with more data that was used to address the research questions of the study (Hennink et al., 2017). Selecting the convenience sampling technique and the purposive sampling technique were the appropriate methods to address the needs of the study.

Data Collection

Data collection for the qualitative study began after approval was received from Liberty University's Internal Review Board (IRB). Once approval was received, participants were emailed informed consent documents. Following the submission of the informed consent documents, data collection was accomplished through conducting semi-structured interviews utilizing an interview guide.

Instruments

In qualitative research, the researcher is the key data collection instrument (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The researcher used a semi-structured interview schedule as the main instrument for data collection. Semi-structured interviews are commonly used in qualitative research to seek a deeper understanding of the human experience (Bearman, 2019). Semi-structured interviews allowed the opportunity to develop personalized open-ended questions based on participant response (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Interviews with each participant were conducted face-to-face. Instead of having the participant fill out the interview guide alone, questions were asked verbally to identify underlying nonverbal cues. Nonverbal cues provide subliminal messages that can help in understanding the verbal responses of the participants (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Nonverbal cues can also provide the researcher with an idea of how comfortable a participant is with the line of questioning (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Participants were interviewed individually, which Moser and Korstjens (2017) found provided additional comfortability for each interviewee. Ensuring each participant was comfortable facilitated the opportunity for the interviewee to provide more in-depth data based on their experiences (Moser & Korstjens, 2017).

Before conducting the interviews, an interview guide was developed. The interview guide provided a complete overview of the interview process including the introduction, the questions being posed to the participants, and the concluding procedures. Developing the interview guide assured there was consistency between each participant, as the interview guide worked as a checklist for each question that was posed to the participants (Bird, 2016). Appendix A shows the questions that were asked to each participant. Interview questions were developed with the intent to address the problem being examined and address the research questions presented in section one. Questions in the interview guide were separated into three parts to correspond with the three research questions of the study.

Data Collection Techniques

The primary data collection technique used for the study was a semi-structured interview approach (Bearman, 2019). Interviews were conducted through one-on-one meetings at each of the participant's place of employment. Conducting interviews individually at each facility allowed the interviewee to feel more comfortable, which enabled the opportunity for more information to be gathered from the participants (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). Interviews were roughly 45 to 60 minutes each. Robson and McCartan (2016) found interviews under 30 minutes would be unlikely to provide anything of value, and interviews over 60 minutes would reduce the number of persons willing to participate due to time constraints. Interviews were recorded on audiotape to allow the researcher to transcribe the interview when finished. Notes taken in the field were transcribed on the interview guide. Scribing notes on the interview guide allowed for comments to be made regarding the participant's nonverbal cues that were observed by the researcher (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Combining the audio recordings of the interview with the notes made on the interview guide, enabled the opportunity to revisit each of the participant's interview sessions for further study after all interviews were completed.

Data Organization Techniques

Upon completion of the interview, data were uploaded on to a password-protected computer. Password protecting the computer was an important part of ensuring participant confidentiality. Each audio file uploaded was stored in its own personalized folder, which was coded to ensure traceability. Folder coding was based on the leader's name, organization, and date of the interview. Once the audio recording was uploaded and stored for security, the researcher would playback each recording to scribe the interview. After the interview responses were typed, the document, along with any field notes, was stored in the appropriately coded folder for each interviewee.

Summary of Data Collection

During the data collection process information and insight were gathered from each participant (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Data were collected and organized on a password-protected computer, with a two-step authenticator, to ensure participant confidentiality. Each of the participants had a folder where three files were saved. The files included the field notes from the interview, the audio recording of the interview, and the typed version of the interview. Data were collected and stored before the process of data analysis began.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of interpreting data that have been collected, coded, and organized (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Audio recording of the interview sessions, field notes transcribed on the interview guide during interviews, and the transcribed document of the interview were all collected for data analysis. Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed to better facilitate data analysis (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Analyzing data commenced upon completion of data collection. Each of the three files collected during the interview process were stored in a secure personalized folder, which contained the participant's last name, place of employment, and date of the interview.

Creswell (2014) shared data analysis should include preparing the data, reading the data, coding the data, and identifying themes present within the data. Data was prepared by typing audio recordings for each interview. Both the transcribed document and the field notes were then stored in their corresponding folders on the password-protected computer for coding. In research, memory cannot be relied upon, so it was important to read the data that were transcribed for review (Creswell, 2014). Additionally, the field notes and interview guide were re-examined by the researcher and each interviewee to ensure full understanding of the data collected. Participants were allowed to read the transcripts to assure there was no misappropriation of data. After the data were prepared and reviewed, they were coded to identify themes. Open coding and axial coding were the selected methods to code data. The coding process section provides rationale behind selecting the open coding method and the axial coding method.

Coding Process

Data coding is the process in which data is assembled, categorized, and sorted based upon the emergent themes (Williams & Moser, 2019). Data were organized and coded for interpretation (Williams & Moser, 2019). The tool used to code the data was a Microsoft Excel file. Two coding processes were used in the qualitative study, including open coding and axial coding. Data were analyzed with the objective of identifying themes, developing categories based on these themes, and determining similarities between the categories developed for interpretation.

Open coding is where the researcher identified themes for categorization (Williams & Moser, 2019). Open coding started with the examination of transcribed interview documents to identify similar responses from each participant. Open coding was also used to identify key concepts found within the collected data set (Blair, 2015). After the data was examined during the open coding process, emergent themes were put into a Microsoft Excel file and assigned a number. Numbers were used to track and organize commonalities found in the data. To organize the emergent themes, a table was created in the Microsoft Excel file identifying common themes with their assigned number. Further clarity was evidenced by comparing all commonalities and their assigned numbers in one location. Once the first process of coding was finished, the next step was to move to the axial coding process.

The next step in the coding process was the use of axial coding. Axial coding was used to clarify themes and categories found during the open coding process (Allen, 2017). Axial coding was necessary to examine the relationships presented during the open coding process (Vollsted & Rezat, 2019). During the axial coding process, categories that were created during the open coding process in the Microsoft Excel file were examined to identify commonalities found between concepts and categories. Identifying commonalities between concepts and categories allowed for an understanding of how the codes related to one another (Allen, 2017). Finding commonalities in coding helped interpret the data collected (Allen, 2017). Through the process of open coding and axial coding, data were then interpreted.

Summary of Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data interpretation is formed through coding and organizing information collected from the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Open coding was used to identify themes within the study, and axial coding was integrated to gain a deeper comprehension of how each of the themes related to one another. Microsoft Excel was the selected tool to organize commonalities and themes identified through processes of open coding and axial coding. Clearly coded and organized data facilitated the process of identifying themes and commonalities from transcribed interview documents.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are tools used for evaluating the results of a study (Mohajan, 2017). Reliability evaluates the degree to which the instruments used within the study can control random error. Additionally, reliability refers to the consistency within a study. Validity evaluates how accurately an instrument measures what it intended to measure. Spiers et al. (2018) determined high levels of reliability and validity within qualitative research correlates to more trustworthiness during the decision-making process. To ensure reliability and validity within the study, the steps presented within this section were implemented.

Reliability

Leung (2015) determined in qualitative research; reliability is the consistency of research procedures. Yin's (2014) principles of data collection were implemented into the study to support consistency including how multiple sources would increase confidence in readers. Rather than rely on one source, data were gathered from 12 leaders working for the selected nonprofits. An interview guide was created to assure questions remained constant. Noble and Smith (2015) asserted implementing tools, such as the interview guide, contributes to credibility and consistency by assuring each participant is asked the same question.

Yin's (2014) next principle of data collection to ensure reliability was to create a case study database. The case study database was started immediately following the first interview. Included in the case study database was the audio-recorded interview, the printed version of the interview, and notes transcribed on the interview guide during the interview. Reliability in data collection was accomplished when information is organized, categorized, and coded (Yin, 2014). All information gathered during the semi-structured interview process was organized into individual folders labeled with the participant's last name, place of employment, and the date of the interview. Semi-structured interviews are data collection processes where the researcher asks participants open-ended questions to obtain as much data pertinent to the topic as possible (Bearman, 2019). After the interviews, data were then categorized and coded through two coding processes, which were the open coding process and the axial coding process.

The final principle of establishing reliability during the data collection process was to maintain a chain of evidence (Yin, 2014). Maintaining a chain of evidence was accomplished by accurately citing data collected during the data analysis process. Information was organized, categorized, and coded through two processes of coding, which were open coding and axial coding. Data gathered was stored on a password-protected computer in individual folders to assure no original evidence was lost. Taking such precautions helped to maintain a chain of evidence through the development of case study questions all the way through to the case study findings. Establishing reliability and validity within the study develops credibility.

Validity

Data triangulation and data saturation are processes used in qualitative research that impact the validity of the study (Wray et al., 2007). Data triangulation refers to the process of collecting data from multiple sources, which enhanced the credibility of the study (Salkind, 2010). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 leaders working for the selected nonprofits. Data were organized, categorized, and coded through the processes of open coding and axial coding. Open coding is the first level of coding, and this is where the researcher tried to identify themes for categorization (Williams & Moser, 2019). Axial coding was used to clarify themes and categories found during the open coding process (Allen, 2017). Axial coding was also necessary to examine the relationships presented during the open coding process (Vollsted & Rezat, 2019). Data were coded in a Microsoft Excel file to identify emergent themes. Themes in research are characterized experiences from participants that can be identified as commonalities through the coding process (Allen, 2017). Identifying the commonalities in themes from the coding processes works to enhance the validity of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data triangulation allowed for obtaining data from multiple sources. The next step in enhancing the validity of study was to saturate the data.

Data saturation refers to the point when signs of redundancy appear and no new information is presented (Hennink et al., 2017). Once data were fully saturated, data analysis began (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Hennink et al. (2017) found saturation can be met at nine participants, as long as the sample is representative of the population. To ensure saturation, 12 total interviews were conducted with leaders working for the selected nonprofits. Three leaders were interviewed at each of the Massillon, Navarre, and Tuscarawas County YMCAs, and one from each of the Massillon, Canton, and Akron Salvation Army offices. The sample of selected participants was chosen based on two sampling methods: the convenience method and the purposive method. Additionally, to ensure increased validity during the data saturation process, member checking was conducted.

Member checking is a technique used to examine credibility of the results obtained (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Member checking was used in the study to add more validity to the data saturation process. After the audio recordings were transcribed and stored on a password-protected computer, transcripts were presented to each participant. Presenting individual transcripts to each participant assured that data was not misinterpreted. Offering transcripts and analysis to the participants allows them to judge accuracy and credibility, which enhances the validity of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Summary of Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are tools used to evaluate the quality of research (Noble & Smith, 2015). Achieving reliability was accomplished through instilling consistency measures, such as the interview guide and establishing the case study database. Establishing consistency throughout the study allowed for maintaining the chain of evidence, which was a pivotal part of assuring reliability (Yin, 2014). Securing validity in the study was accomplished through data triangulation, data saturation, and member checking.

Transition and Summary of Section Two

Part two of the study presented many aspects of the research including sampling methods used, the data collection and coding process, and the reliability and validity of the study. Participants were gathered through two sampling methods including the convenience method and the purposive method. Information obtained from the participants was collected and stored on a password-protected computer. Once the data was securely stored information was coded through two layers of coding, which were opening coding and axial coding. From the coding process, data were organized to try and identify themes present within the study. This summary paragraph works as a transitionary divide into section three of the study.

Section Three: Application to Professional Practice and Implication for Change

This section of the qualitative research study assesses the application to professional practice and the implications for change. Presented in this section of the research study are the themes that were identified from the interview process, how these themes relate to the research questions, and how these themes address the problem of the study. Section three of the study concludes with personal reflections pertinent to the research study.

Overview of the Study

This qualitative research study was developed with the goal of addressing the problem of the study and answering the three research questions. To address the research questions, participants in the study had to be working in a leadership position for one of the selected nonprofit organizations. By working in a leadership position for one of the selected nonprofits, information obtained was used to address the research questions and contribute to the current body of knowledge regarding leader-to-employee engagement. During the interview process, 12 leaders were interviewed. Each interview was approximately 45 minutes in length and each participant was asked questions from the interview guide. The interview guide was divided into three parts to align with the three research questions of the study. Part one of the interview guide posed questions that were developed to address research question one, part two posed questions to address research question two, and part three had questions developed to address the third research question of study.

Presentation of Findings

This section of the research study presents the emergent themes and how they support current literature pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement. Section three of the study also reveals how information collected from the interview process addresses the problem of the study, the three research questions, and the purpose of the study. To address the problem being examined in the study, 12 interviews were conducted with leaders working for the selected nonprofit organizations. From the interview process, six themes emerged.

Anticipated Themes

Themes were revealed during the open and axial coding processes. Themes were revealed during the coding process, as the data below were identified by multiple participants during the interview process.

Theme One: Commit to employees by involving them in business decisions.

Theme Two: Open communication with an employee eases the process of engagement.

Theme Three: More literature must be available pertaining to employee engagement.

Theme Four: Leaders of nonprofit organizations face the challenge of trying to engage with their employees with fewer resources available.

Theme Five: Employee empowerment is an essential part of employee engagement.

Theme Six: Leaders must establish trust by being honest with their employees.

Missing Theme

Missing Theme: A major incentive of successful leader-to-employee engagement is improved company culture.

Theme One Commitment

A theme that was prevalent throughout the interview process was the level of emphasis leaders placed on showing commitment to an employee. This commitment included involving employees in business decisions, providing needed supported, and valuing the employees. Leaders that involve employees in business decisions are more likely to enjoy success in engaging employees (Stoyanova & Lliev, 2017). Hanaysha (2016) found committing to an employee leads to more successful employee engagement. Eldor and Harpaz (2016) found when leadership commits to an employee, the employee is more likely to engage with leadership and work performances will improve. Commitment became an anticipated theme before the interview process due to the volume of references found in literature that emphasized commitment as a needed technique for establishing employee engagement.

Part one of the interview guide posed questions developed to identify which techniques participants felt were needed to establish employee engagement. Two themes emerged from part one of the interview guide. The first theme identified from the interview process was commitment by leadership to their employees. Participants noted commitment as a needed technique to establish successful leader-to-employee engagement. Findings from the interview process supported the findings in literature, as participants identified that when they committed to their employees, they were easier to engage with.

Participants three and six both stated the importance of ensuring each employee is involved in making business decisions by emphasizing the need for having skin in the game. These findings supported literature in identifying the importance of involving employees in decision-making. Oyebamiji (2018) found an organization achieves more success when employees are involved in business decisions. Employees that are involved in decision-making will feel more valued by the organization and be more likely to engage with leadership (Oyebamiji, 2018). Participant three stated the following regarding the importance of committing to an employee: “I believe that I've learned over the years that employees have to kind of have some skin in the game. I think that's the best way to keep employees engaged.”

Participant six echoed the importance of ensuring each employee has skin in the game when there are decisions being made for the business by stating: “Making sure that they understand their position and what they are supposed to be doing and making sure that they have some sort of skin in the game."

Participants ten and four also identified the importance of committing to employees but emphasized the need for keying in on an individual's strengths. This finding supported the findings in literature regarding playing to an employee's strengths. When employees can maximize their strengths, an organization, and its team members all flourish (Bakker & Woerkom, 2018). Employees that are able to maximize their strengths are more motivated and more likely to engage with leadership. Participant ten stated: "We need to be able to key in on the individual, and what worked best for them. Participant four echoed the same sentiment regarding the importance of committing to the employees by devoting oneself to the employee's success: "I want to commit to them. I want to devote myself to them because it is my job to help them succeed."

Participant one noted the importance of committing to employees by involving them in changes in the business process. The importance of involving employees in business changes is supported by the findings in literature. Change is inevitable in business, but the process of change can be eased when employees are involved (Hussain et al., 2018). When leadership involves employees in business changes, employees feel more valued by leadership. Employees that feel valued are more satisfied and more likely to engage with leadership. Participant one stated the following regarding the importance of committing to an employee: "If there was a change that needed to be made due to an issue, I found that if I talked to them about it and I tried to include them as much as I could in the change that was helpful."

Summary of Theme One

Leaders that involve employees in workplace decisions are showing their commitment to the employees, which can lead to developing high levels of successful work engagement

(Attridge, 2009). Committing to an employee has been identified throughout literature as an important technique needed by leadership to establish employee engagement. Findings from the interview process supported findings from literature in regard to the importance of involving employees in workplace decisions. Participants identified showing commitment to their employees as a needed technique to establish successful leader-to-employee engagement.

Theme Two Communication

A second theme found during the interview process was the importance participants placed on communication. Participants discussed how important communication was with their employees when trying to establish successful leader-to-employee engagement. Communication being a key component of employee engagement supported the literature review of the study. Communication keeps employees informed and allows for information to flow more efficiently throughout the organization (Sandhya & Kumar, 2011). Kang and Sung (2017) identified communication as a technique leaders need to utilize to successfully engage with their employees. Open communication between leadership and their subordinates eases the process of leader-to-employee engagement (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017). Participants in the study identified ways in which they used communication as a technique to engage their teams. Communication was an anticipated theme before the interview process because of the links literature presented between improved communication and successful leader-to-employee engagement.

Findings from the interview process supported the findings from literature in identifying the importance of strong communication between leadership and their employees. Part one of the interview guide was developed to identify which techniques participants from the study found were the most important when trying to establish leader-to-employee engagement. A theme that emerged from the interview process was the importance of open communication. The findings from the interview process supported the findings in literature as participants identified that when they open communication channels with their employees, their employees feel more comfortable in engaging with leadership.

Participants noted the importance of communication when it comes to developing relationships. Participants determined that when communication is open, employees are easier to engage with. The engagement process was smoother because a relationship was already developed through communication. The importance of communication in regard to employee engagement supported the findings in literature. Kang and Sung (2017) determined leadership should utilize communication channels to develop relationships with employees. When employees feel leadership is open with communication and values their input, the process of employee engagement is easier to establish. Participant two stated the following regarding the importance of communication in relationship development: “I believe when employees know each other, they work better together. So, I focus a lot on getting to know each other.”

Participant three echoed the same sentiment on the importance of developing relationships. The participant felt Monday meetings were the most importance for open communication and relationship development by stating: “That Monday morning meeting everybody attends, and it really makes the people feel involved here, so that is the tool that I think is most important.”

Participant four felt strongly about the importance of communication when it comes to developing relationships. This participant felt that one of the most important techniques needed to develop relationships with employees is opening the lines of communication. Participant four stated: “I always felt that first you need to develop a relationship. Set those boundaries; make sure that employee knows the task they are supposed to do. That way they feel like they can speak, and that line of communication is open."

Many participants emphasized the importance of communication when it comes to problem-solving and handling business decisions. Participants felt that when they were communicating with employees, employees were more informed and able to overcome organizational challenges. Findings from the interview process supported the findings from literature. Mayfield and Mayfield (2015) found when leaders maximize communication and keep employees informed, employees are better able to handle challenging business situations. Meng et al. (2017) found open communication with each employee reduces operational challenges and improves the leader-to-employee relationships. Participant six stated the following regarding the importance of open communication: "I would say, open door communication, making sure that they feel comfortable enough to come to you with a problem."

Participant eight echoed the need for open door communication by emphasizing the benefits that come with open communication. Participant eight commented on the advantage of open communication for operational success saying, "It is just, you want good employee engagement, and this will transition into good customer service. Just having a good staff, that you can communicate with, and no matter how you do it."

Summary of Theme Two

Employees that are more informed are more likely to remain with their organization, as better communication is linked to improved job satisfaction (Sandhya & Kumar, 2011). Communication helps information flow more efficiently through the organization and supports everyone working towards the same goals. As a nonprofit, resource availability was a major challenge identified during the interview process, which will be discussed in theme four. Participants identified open communication as a technique needed by leadership to overcome resource availability and better engage with their staff. Findings from the interview process supported the findings from literature in linking strong communication to successful leader-to-employee engagement.

Theme Three: Need more Literature Pertaining to Employee Engagement

Part two of the interview guide posed questions to participants that centered around challenges each leader has faced when trying to engage employees. A common theme that emerged during the interview process was the gaps in information pertaining to employee engagement. The call to action for this study was the need for more information regarding employee engagement. Information obtained from the interview process helped to address the problem of the study. Additionally, data collected supported the study's literature review.

Researchers have determined there are gaps regarding information pertaining to employee engagement (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016; Juan et al., 2018; Park, 2017). Gaps in information regarding employee engagement can create challenges for leaders who are looking for guidance when trying to engage with employees. During the interview process, participants identified many challenges they have faced when trying to engage with their employees due to the gaps regarding information pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement. Additionally, participants identified the importance of having available information when trying to engage employees.

Participants identified the need for more information regarding leader-to-employee engagement as a major challenge they face when trying to engage employees. Participants concluded optimal employee engagement is reduced when there are gaps in information. Findings from the interview process supported the findings in literature regarding gaps in information as a challenge leaders face when trying to engage employees. A major challenge facing leader-to-employee engagement includes the gaps in information (Park, 2017). More in-depth information needs to be gathered to address these gaps in information available (Howley et al., 2019). Participant eight discussed the challenges the leader has faced when trying to find information available pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement: “Just the lack of literature itself is just amazing. You would not believe hard it is just trying to find stuff.”

Participant nine echoed the need for more literature pertaining to leader-to employee engagement. Participant nine found that organizations cannot operate at optimal levels without the gaps in information being addressed by stating: “I think if there is a gap in the literature, I think it goes for any organization that employee engagement is not going to be at its optimal level.”

Participant seven identified the challenge of referencing information available regarding employee engagement to each employee. The participant felt that every employee is different and there needs to be more information available dealing with each individual employee. This finding supported Chowdhury’s (2019) research that determined a more in-depth approach to employee engagement must be taken to help address the gaps in literature. If a more in-depth approach is taken, then more information can be available regarding employee engagement. Participant seven stated the following pertaining to gaps in information pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement: “I think some of it is just the sheer idea that what one employee may need information on is different than another employee, and one employee there may not be information out there because it is something that is never been thought of or brought up.”

Participants also found they have challenges obtaining information regarding leader-to-employee engagement that is relevant to their organizations. Participants felt that information is not as accessible to smaller nonprofits, such as the organizations they work for. Participants one and four felt information is more geared toward the larger companies such as fortune 500 companies. Larger companies have more capital and more resources available to them to obtain information and address challenges (Skinner, 2017). Participant one stated the following regarding their challenges when trying to obtain information pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement that is relevant to their organization: “I think within our organization, I do not know if there is a lot of content in regard to employee engagement.”

Participant four echoed the sentiments of participant one regarding the accessibility of available information. Participant four felt that information regarding leader-to-employee engagement was not as accessible that directly pertains to the nonprofit organization in which they work. Participant four stated: “A lot of times, information is not readily accessible for my organization.”

Summary of Theme Three

Gaps in information regarding employee engagement proved to be both an anticipated theme of the study and the call for action. The need for more information pertaining to employee engagement was an anticipated theme due to the gaps in information that were identified by literature. Borah and Barua (2018) determined there are gaps in information in regard to employee engagement. Findings from the interview process supported the literature review of the study by identifying gaps in information pertaining to employee engagement as a challenge leaders face.

Theme Four Resource Availability

A theme that was prevalent throughout the interview process included challenges participants have faced due to resource availability. During the interview process, participants identified many different types of challenges they have faced when trying to overcome the resource shortage in an effort to engage with their employees. The emergent theme of resource availability supported the findings from literature. Nonprofit leaders face the challenge of trying to engage employees with fewer resources available to them (Bouek, 2018). Leaders of nonprofits must try providing service to clients with fewer resources available (Smith, 2018). Skinner (2017) also identified resource availability as a prominent obstacle nonprofit leadership faces.

Resource availability was identified as an anticipated theme before the interview process, due to its presence in literature. Current literature has presented resource availability as a major challenge nonprofit leaders face. Findings from the interview process supported literature, as the participants identified resource availability as one of their most prominent obstacles when trying to engage employees. Participants presented a link between resource availability and employee satisfaction. Many participants felt that as leaders they have to work harder to overcome resource availability. Participants found that employees may feel less valued because they are not being paid as much as employees working for-profit organizations. This aligns with Cronley and Kim’s (2014) findings that a major challenge facing nonprofit leaders is the availability of resources, such as capital, to overcome business challenges. Participant two stated the following regarding how resource availability impacts their organization: “Sometimes I think an employee might feel their self-worth is not important to, you know, an employer, because they are not making that huge dollar amount.”

Participant six and eleven responded very similarly to participant two in identifying pay as a major challenge in developing leader-to-employee engagement: “We do not have the tangible physical pay raises and stuff that other companies would have every year you know.” Participant eleven stated the following in identifying employee pay as a major challenge nonprofit leaders face when trying to develop employee engagement. Participant eleven stated:

"Sometimes that obstacle of not being able to have a higher pay scale can be pretty hard to get over, and so you establish these good relationships with them."

Many participants emphasized the challenges their organizations face due to the lack of available resources. Participants felt that their organizations face many constraints due to the shortage of available resources. This supported the findings of Smith (2018) who found nonprofit leaders must try to compete with for-profit leaders in terms of quality with fewer resources available. Fewer available resources make it more challenging for nonprofit leaders to support their surrounding communities. Participant four stated the challenges their organization has faced due to the lack of resources available to them: "You don't have the money. That is the number one thing that we do not have in the nonprofit world." Participant seven echoed this sentiment and determined financial constraints create the largest obstacles for nonprofit leaders. Participant seven stated the following: "I think nonprofit leaders have a harder time because of the financial constraints of being a nonprofit."

Summary of Theme Four

Nonprofit leaders face the challenges of trying to provide quality service with fewer resources available (Smith, 2018). The challenge of trying to serve others with less available resources was a common theme found in literature. This common theme in literature was supported by the findings from the interview process. Participants identified resource availability as a major challenge they face as nonprofit leaders.

Theme Five Employee Empowerment

The fifth anticipated theme that emerged from the interview process was the emphasis participants placed on employee empowerment. Empowering employees makes them feel more valued, and they in turn are more likely to commit to the organization (Anand, 2017). The theme of empowering employees was identified in literature as a needed action by leadership to establish employee engagement. Anand (2017) found employee empowerment is a much-needed action by leadership to successfully engage employees. Prathiba (2016) also identified employee empowerment as a needed action by leadership to engage employees. Additionally, Natrajan et al. (2019) identified employee empowerment as a tool that leadership should use to engage employees.

In part three of the interview guide, participants were asked questions developed to help identify which actions or behaviors were needed to establish employee engagement. The objective of part three of the interview guide was developed to support the focus of research question three: What leadership actions or behaviors contribute to establishing strong employee engagement techniques within selected YMCAs and Salvation Army offices located in Ohio? From the interview process, two themes emerged. The first theme that emerged from part three of the interview guide was the emphasis participants placed on employee empowerment when trying to engage employees. Participants identified employee empowerment as a much-needed action by leadership in order to establish successful employee engagement, which supported the findings from the literature review.

Many participants found employees are more satisfied with their work when they are empowered. Participants found that when they empower employees, the employees are more satisfied and more likely to commit to the organization. This finding from the interview process supported the findings in literature in identifying the importance of empowerment when it comes to employee satisfaction. Luck and Leyh (2017) determined when employees are more satisfied, leadership has an easier time trying to engage with the employees. If leadership provides supported to employees by empowering them, the employee will feel more valued and be more likely to commit to the organization (Sharma & Singh, 2018). Participant two emphasized the importance of employee empowerment by stating: “They need to feel that they are important. They need to feel that you are investing in them. You have a happy employee; you are going to have a happy outcome.”

Participant five echoed the statements from participant two in emphasizing the importance of reassuring employees. The participant felt when employees are reassured, they are more likely to be satisfied with their work. Participant five found when employees are satisfied the organization will see more success. Participant five stated: “Some people just need reassured that what they are doing is beneficial.”

Participant one emphasized the importance of empowering employees when it comes to making business decisions. The participant felt that when employees are more empowered an organization succeeds because employees are better equipped to handle business situations. Organizational success increases when leadership empowers their employees by equipping them to make business decisions (Katz, 2009). When leadership empowers their employees, employees feel more valued and are more likely to engage with leadership (Namasivayam et al., 2014). Participant one stated the following regarding the importance of employee empowerment: “I hire the right people that are skilled and so that we can make decisions together. So, in order for them to be able to do that I have to empower.”

Participants also found when they empower their employees, the employees are more likely to succeed. Participants four and eight took a different stance than most participants, as most participants linked employee empowerment to organizational success. These participants linked employee empowerment to employee success. Natrajan et al. (2019) determined employees that are empowered by leadership are likely to perform more effectively than employees who are not empowered by leadership. Employees are the most valuable resources for an organization and leadership must empower them in order for them to succeed (Nasomboon, 2014). Participant four linked employee empowerment to employee success by stating: “Willingness to help that individual succeed, and we want to encourage.” Participant eight also noted the importance of empowering employees, as this helps the employee succeed. Participant eight stated: “You definitely want to empower employees to exceed and excel at whatever they are doing.”

Summary of Theme Five

The theme of employee empowerment that emerged from the interview process supported the findings in literature. Researchers, such as Tsourvakas and Yafantidou (2018), Anand (2017), and others presented employee empowerment as a much-needed action by leadership to establish successful employee engagement. Due to the emphasis literature has placed on employee empowerment in relation to employee engagement, this became an anticipated theme before the interview process. Findings from the interview process supported the importance of employee empowerment, as this was identified as a needed action by leadership to establish successful employee engagement.

Theme Six Honesty

The sixth anticipated theme that emerged from the interview process was the emphasis participants placed on developing trust with their employees by being honest with them. McManus and Mosca (2015) found to foster trust, leaders must be honest with their employees. This means being open about business operations and facilitating information honestly about the current situation with employees. Employees are the most valuable commodity within an organization and without team engagement the organization cannot succeed. Establishing trust through honesty was an anticipated theme, based on the findings from literature. Zajkowska

(2012) found one of the necessary actions needed to establish successful employee engagement is honesty.

In part three of the interview guide, participants were posed questions that focused on gathering information pertaining to which actions or behaviors are needed to establish strong employee engagement. An anticipated theme that emerged from the interview process was the importance of developing trust with employees by being honest with them. The anticipated theme of honesty supported literature in being a necessary action by leadership to successfully engage employees. During the interview process participants emphasized the importance of honesty when trying to engage with their employees.

Participants emphasized the importance of being honest with employees and not saying things that could potentially damage the leader-to-employee relationship. Participants noted that leaders should be honest with their employees and not discuss pertinent information behind their backs. Doing so would give them a bad reputation as leaders and make it harder to engage with their employees. Discussion from the participants also supported the findings in literature on the importance of being an ethical leader. Leaders that exhibit honesty and positive communication, along with individualized consideration, are more successful in motivating and engaging their employees (Pasha et al., 2017). Leaders must develop a trust with their employees by being honest about organizational changes and employee performance. Participant three stated the following on the importance of being honest with their employees: “I think a high amount of respect. Honesty and not talking behind somebody's back or something.” Participant five echoed the sentiments of participant three in regard to the importance of honesty and integrity in leadership by stating: **“**To be a good leader, you have to be responsible if you're constantly getting caught in a, in a lie with your employees they're not going to see you as a responsible leader."

Participants found they must be honest with their employees in order to be successful leaders. Participants felt that if they are honest with their employees, their employees will be honest with them. Participants felt honesty eases the process of employee engagement. Findings from the interview process supported the findings from literature regarding the importance of honesty in leadership. Sharma et al. (2019) determined leadership must be honest and open with their employees. When leadership exhibits honesty it shows integrity. Leaders who show integrity through honesty are more likely to develop successful leader-to-employee engagement (Sharma et al., 2019). Participant two stated the following regarding the importance of honesty in leadership: "So, I think as a good leader, you need to be wholeheartedly invested, you need to be honest."

During the interview process, participant twelve identified being honest as the most important action that leadership must exhibit to be successful in establishing employee engagement. Participant twelve stated: **"**The first thing that I think of is being honest and open, being truthful with your employees."

Summary of Theme Six

The theme of being honest with employees emerged from the interview process and supported the findings in literature as a necessary action by leadership to establish successful employee engagement. Zajkowska (2012) presented honesty as a needed action by leadership to supported successful employee engagement. Honesty within the organization can improve corporate strategy and also the individual development of employees (Zajkowska, 2012). Findings from the interview process supported the importance of being honest with employees, as participants noted honesty is an action that they have used to establish successful employee engagement.

Missing Theme

Throughout the interview process six anticipated themes emerged. One anticipated theme was expected but failed to emerge during the interview process. The researcher anticipated company culture would be identified from the interview process. Participants were posed questions that were developed to identify which incentives they felt were most prominent when employees are successfully engaged. This section of the research study discussed why improved company culture was a missing anticipated theme.

Improved company culture has been identified numerous times throughout literature as one of the major incentives that come with successful employee engagement (Slack et al., 2015). Perceived expectations leaned towards improved company culture as one of the emergent themes. Multiple questions within the interview guide were established to identify what participants felt were major advantages and incentives that came with successful employee engagement. All three parts of the interview guide had questions within them that were developed to identify the incentives and advantages of successful employee engagement. Improved company culture was an anticipated theme but was not one identified from the interview process.

The reason improved company culture was an anticipated theme was due to the prominence company culture has in literature. Exhaustive study of literature supported the ideology that when employees are sufficiently engaged with leadership the organization’s company culture will improve. Improved company culture is one of the major incentives that come from successful leader-to-employee engagement (Slack et al., 2015). When employees are efficiently engaged with leadership, the organization will see the benefit of improved company culture. The literature review presented a number of researchers that have identified improved company culture as one of the major incentives that come with successful employee engagement. The researcher anticipated that improved company culture would be a common theme during the interview process. Unfortunately, this theme did not emerge and was noted as a missing anticipated theme from the study.

Representation and Visualization of Data

Table two provides a recapitulation of collected data. Data obtained within the table is from literature pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement and from the participants selected for the study. Table two presents a brief comparison and relationship between the research questions of the study, the information collected from the participants, and the current literature regarding leader-to-employee engagement. The purpose of the table is to provide visual support for the relationship between the anticipated themes and the research questions of the study.

Table 2 Representation and Visualization of Data

Anticipated Themes	**Sections of the Interview in which Themes Emerged**	**Relationship to Literature**	**Participant Quotes Addressing the Research Questions**
Commitment	Part one	Leaders that involve employees in business decisions are more likely to have success with employee engagement	RQ1: “And helping them to be involved with what you are working on, whatever project it is, making sure that they have a piece of it and that they have a say in what is going to happen. So, I think that's the best way to keep employees engaged.” Participant Three

		(Stoyanova & Lliev, 2017).	
Open communication	Part one	Kang and Sung (2017) identified communication as a technique leaders need to successfully engage with their employees.	RQ1: "I would say, open door communication, making sure that they feel comfortable enough to come to you with a problem." Participant Six
Gaps in literature	Part two	Park (2017), Eldor and Harpaz (2016), Juan et al. (2018), determined there are gaps in information pertaining to employee engagement.	RQ2: "I think within our organization. I do not know if there is a lot of content in regard to employee engagement." Participant One
Availability of resources	Part two	Leaders of nonprofits also must try providing service to clients with fewer resources	RQ2: "It is obvious that those resources are not going to be as bountiful as those for, for profit organizations." Participant Nine

		available (Smith, 2018).	
Employee empowerment	Part three	Anand (2017) found employee empowerment is a much-needed action by leadership to successfully engage employees.	RQ3: “I think it is very important. They need to feel that they are important. They need to feel that you are investing in them. You have a happy employee; you are going have a happy outcome.” Participant Two
Honesty	Part three	McManus and Mosca (2015) found to foster trust leaders must be honest with their employees.	RQ3: “I think, I think definitely honesty is a big one. It is one of our core values for the YMCA.” Participant Five

Relationship to Research Questions

The study was guided by the three research questions. Information gathered for the study was utilized to address the three research questions of the study. The three research questions that guided the study were:

RQ1: What are successful engagement techniques used by leaders in selected YMCAs and Salvation Army offices located in Ohio?

RQ2: What are challenges leaders working for the selected YMCAs and Salvation Army offices face when trying to engage employees?

RQ3: What leadership actions or behaviors contribute to establishing strong employee engagement techniques within selected YMCAs and Salvation Army offices located in Ohio?

From the guidance of the research questions, the interview guide was developed in a way that would align with the research questions. Part one of the interview guide aligned with research question one, part two of the interview guide aligned with research question two, and part three of the interview guide aligned with research question three. From the alignment, relationships and themes were identified. The focus of this section of the study was to identify and discuss how the data collected addressed the research questions.

Part one of the interview guide was developed to address research question one. The first research question focused on techniques leaders used to successfully establish employee engagement. From this focus, part one of the interview guide posed questions aimed to help identify techniques leadership has utilized to establish successful employee engagement. Research question one asked: What are successful engagement techniques used by leaders in selected YMCAs and Salvation Army offices located in Ohio? Questions on the interview guide in part one were developed based on the focus of research question one. Question one of the interview guide asked what techniques the selected participants have used to establish employee engagement. Questions two through six posed questions around the steps needed to identify and integrate these engagement techniques. Additionally, questions were developed to identify how the organization benefits from successful employee engagement. Part one of the interview guide was developed to identify two emergent themes. The themes that emerged were the emphasis of committing to employees and openly communicating with employees.

The first theme identified was the importance of committing to an employee. Nasomboon (2014) found leadership's commitment greatly impacts employee engagement and the success of the organization. Nasomboon (2014) also determined leadership's commitment may be the key factor in establishing employee engagement. Jackson et al. (2012) linked commitment to improved employee behavior. Improved behavior is linked to more job satisfaction and better employee engagement. Information obtained from the interview process assisted in supporting the findings from current literature in identifying commitment as a technique needed to develop leader-to-employee engagement.

The second theme that was identified from part one of the guide was the emphasis leaders place on communication. Grunig (2001) argued strong communication from leadership develops quality employee relationships, which ease the process of employee engagement. By openly communicating with each team member, the employee feels more valued because of the two-way relationship established by leadership (Kang & Sung, 2017). Employees that feel they are heard are more likely to remain with the organization and help the organization succeed (Kang & Sung, 2017). Data collected from the interview process supported the findings from literature in identifying communication as a technique needed for leadership to successfully engage employees.

The first research question of the study was addressed through the combination of current literature and supporting data collected from the interview process. To address the first research question, information from literature needed to align with information collected from the interview process. Two themes that emerged from the interview process that addressed research question one was the importance of commitment to an employee and the importance of strong communication from leadership. Themes identified from the interview process were also prominent in the literature, which is why they were deemed anticipated themes. Current literature combined with themes from the interview process provided the information needed to address the first research question of the study.

The second research question of the study centered on challenges that leaders working for selected nonprofit organizations face when they are trying to engage employees. Research question two of the study was: What are challenges leaders working for the selected YMCAs and Salvation Army offices face when trying to engage employees? Questions in part two of the interview guide were developed based on the focus of research question two. Part two of the interview guide posed five questions with three subset questions. The questions asked in part two of the interview guide focused on trying to identify which obstacles participants felt were most prominent when trying to establish employee engagement. Consequently, two major themes emerged, including the availability of literature and the availability of resources.

Many participants felt the biggest challenge they faced when trying to engage employees was the availability of literature. This emergent theme not only supported the literature review of the study, but also the problem being examined in the study. With gaps in information, obtaining a deeper understanding of leader-to-employee engagement becomes challenging. Saks and Gruman (2014) determined research on employee engagement have been plagued by the lack of consensus on what employee engagement actually means. Renard and Snelgar (2016) noted a lack of qualitative research in specific regions particularly within nonprofits pertaining to employee engagement. Findings in literature supported the data collected from the interview process. Participants noted gaps in information made it more challenging when trying to engage with their employees. By aligning data collected from the interview process with information found in literature, the research question and the problem of the study were both addressed effectively.

The second emergent theme identified from part two of the interview guide was the availability of resources. Nonprofit leaders are tasked with the challenge of trying to provide more services with less available resources (Cronley & Kim, 2014). As such, the literature supported responses participants offered within the study. Many participants noted that because of having fewer resources available, including capital, nonprofit leaders face major challenges when trying to engage employees. With fewer resources available, nonprofit leaders may not have the tools available to sufficiently engage employees. Additionally, participants noted that because less capital is available, employees might feel less valued because they are being underpaid compared to team members of for-profit organizations. This challenge appeared to be prevalent, as many participants identified this as a major challenge they have faced when trying to engage employees. Data collected from the interview process supported literature in identifying resource availability as a major challenge nonprofit leaders face when trying to engage employees.

The second research question of the study was addressed through combining current literature and supporting data collected from the interview process. To address the second research question, information from literature needed to align with information collected from the interview process. Two themes that emerged from the interview process that addressed research question two were the gaps in information regarding employee engagement and the challenge of resource availability. Themes identified from the interview process were also prominent in literature, which is why they were deemed anticipated themes. Current literature combined with themes from the interview process supported the researcher in addressing the second research question and also the problem being examined in the study.

Part three of the interview guide was developed to address the third research question. Research question three of the study was: What leadership actions or behaviors contribute to establishing strong employee engagement techniques within selected YMCAs and Salvation Army offices located in Ohio? The third research question focused on actions or behaviors leadership needed to establish employee engagement. From this focus, part three of the interview guide was developed. Part three of the interview guide posed questions that worked to identify what actions or behaviors leadership needed in order to successfully engage employees. From part three of the interview guide, two major themes emerged, which were employee empowerment and honesty.

The first theme identified from part three of the interview guide was empowering employees. Empowering employees helps individuals to feel more valued and feel more motivated to contribute to the organization (Namasivayam et al., 2014). Additionally, by empowering employees, they are more likely to commit to the organization and leadership. The theme of employee empowerment was emergent during the interview process. Participants noted when they empowered employees the employees were more motivated to handle business situations. Leaders who participated in the study determined empowering employees is an action that must be taken in order to engage with their employees. This emergent theme was identified from part three of the interview guide.

The second theme identified from part three of the interview guide was that participants felt a necessary action to establish successful employee engagement was being honest with employees. When leaders communicate honestly with their employees, a trust is formed. When trust is formed, employee engagement is more easily established (Holland et al., 2017). The action of honesty also ties into the technique of committing to an employee, as employees are more likely to commit when they feel they can trust leadership. Honesty was an anticipated theme to emerge during the interview process, as literature has emphasized the importance of leadership being honest with their employees. Participants noted honest communication was a major part of establishing strong employee engagement. The anticipated theme of honesty supported the findings in literature and addressed the third research question.

The third research question of the study was addressed through the combination of current literature and supporting data collected from the interview process. To address the third research question, information from literature had to align with information collected from the interview process. Two themes that emerged from the interview process that addressed research question three included the importance of employee empowerment and honesty. Themes identified from the interview process were also prominent in literature. Current literature combined with themes from the interview process provided the information needed to address the third research question.

Relationship to the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework section of the study works to show the relationship between the concepts and themes introduced (Jabareen, 2009). This section of the study links the relationship between themes identified from the study and concepts identified in section one and two of the study. The study was guided by two theories, which were the leader-member exchange theory (LMX) and the path-goal theory. The guiding theories of the study supported the researcher in gathering in-depth information pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement. Information obtained through the guiding theories aligned with the information collected from the selected participants.

The LMX theory centers on interactions between leadership and their employees (Northouse, 2019). The LMX theory was selected as a guiding theory for this study to support in obtaining information relating to the relationship between leadership and their employees. By obtaining in-depth information pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement, the purpose of the study was met by contributing information to the current body of knowledge regarding leader-to-employee engagement. The LMX theory was selected as a guiding theory for this study, as it has been used in previous studies to obtain a deeper understanding of the relationship between leadership and their employees (Valle et al., 2019). Incorporating the LMX theory supported the researcher in obtaining in-depth information that was used to address the research questions of the study, the problem being examined, and fulfilled the purpose of the study.

The other guiding theory for the study was the path goal theory. The path-goal theory supposes the relationship between leaders and subordinates focuses on factors needed by leadership to motivate and engage their employees (Northouse, 2019). The path-goal theory was selected as a guiding theory for the study to assist the researcher in obtaining a greater understanding of the factors needed by leadership to engage their employees. Researchers such as Farhan (2018) and Famakin and Abisuga (2016) incorporated the path-goal theory in their study to obtain more knowledge on the actions needed by leadership to engage their employees. Utilization of the path-goal theory supported the researcher in obtaining in-depth information that was used to address the research questions of the study, the problem being examined, and fulfilled the purpose of the study.

As a result of applying the LMX and path goal theories, information found in the literature review of the study presented themes that were anticipated before the interview process began. Information in the literature review section of this study provided an exhaustive overview of information pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement that was gathered through the guidance of the LMX theory and the path goal theory. The data collected and coded from the selected participants supported the literature in addressing the three research questions, the problem being examined, and fulfilled the purpose of the study. Information collected from the selected participants supported the conceptual framework of the study by aligning with the guiding theories of the study.

Relationship to the Literature

Information collected from the selected participants had similarities and differences to the current literature regarding leader-to-employee engagement. Six anticipated themes were identified as a result of carrying out semi-structured interviews. There was one anticipated theme that was absent from the interview process and was marked missing. The purpose of this section of the study is to provide an overview of the similarities and differences between the data collected and the current literature regarding leader-to-employee engagement.

Themes One and Two Relationship to Literature

A major similarity between the current literature regarding leader-to-employee engagement and the information collected from the interview process were the techniques utilized by leadership to successfully engage employees. Participants were posed questions that were developed to identify which techniques were successful when trying to engage with employees. Consequently, two anticipated themes emerged revealing the importance of committing to an employee and the importance of keeping communication open with employees. These themes were similar to the findings in literature regarding the techniques needed by leadership to successfully engage employees.

Theme one identified from the interview process was the importance of commitment from leadership to their employees. Multiple participants identified the importance of commitment when trying to engage with their employees. These findings from the interview process were similar to the findings in literature regarding the importance of leadership's commitment to their employees. Researchers suggest leaders must commit to their employees in order to develop successful employee engagement (Hanaysha, 2016; Khan et al., 2015; Northouse, 2019). Leaders that commit to their employees ease the process of developing employee engagement (Hanaysha, 2016). The findings from literature were similar to the findings from the interview process in identifying leadership's commitment to their employees as a necessary technique to establish employee engagement.

The second theme uncovered was the emphasis participants placed on communication when it came to employee engagement. Multiple participants throughout the interview process identified communication as a needed technique when trying to establish leader-to-employee engagement. Findings from the interview process were similar to the findings in literature regarding the importance of communication when it comes to engaging employees. Simpson (2009) found when leadership keeps communication channels open with their employees, employees are more likely to engage with leadership and commit to the organization. Eldor and Vigoda-Gadot (2017) and Kang and Sung (2017) also presented a link between open communication and employee engagement. The findings from literature were similar to the findings from the interview process in identifying leadership's willingness to communicate with their employees as a needed technique to establish employee engagement.

Themes Three and Four Relationship to Literature

The second major similarity between the literature and the data collected from the interview process were the challenges that nonprofit leaders have faced when trying to engage employees. During the interview process participants were posed questions that were developed to identify the major challenges they have faced when trying to engage employees. From these questions, two themes emerged. These themes were the gaps in information available regarding leader-to-employee engagement and the availability of resources. These themes were anticipated before the interview process because of the abundance of literature identifying the need for more literature and resource availability as major challenges facing leadership.

The third theme uncovered was the need for more literature available pertaining to employee engagement. Multiple participants identified the availability of literature as a major challenge they have faced when trying to engage employees. Researchers, such as Chowdhury (2019), Park (2017), and Ruck and Menara (2017), determined there are gaps in information available regarding leader-to-employee engagement. A more holistic approach needs to be taken in regard to leader-to-employee engagement to address the gaps in information available (Howley et al., 2019). The findings from literature were similar to the findings from the interview process in identifying gaps in information available pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement as a major challenge leadership has faced.

Theme four identified from the interview process was the availability of resources. Many participants identified the availability of resources as one of the major challenges they have faced when trying to engage employees. Researchers such as Bouek (2018), Cronley and Kim (2014), and Laurett and Ferreira (2018) determined nonprofit leaders are forced to try and overcome the availability of resources in all avenues of business. These findings were similar to the findings from the interview process in identifying the availability of resources as a major challenge that nonprofit leaders face when trying to engage their employees.

Themes Five and Six Relationship to Literature

The third major similarity between the existing literature and the information collected from the interview process, included the actions or behaviors needed by leadership to develop employee engagement. During the interview process, participants were asked questions that were developed to identify which actions or behaviors they felt were necessary to develop employee engagement. Two themes emerged from these questions including the importance of employee empowerment and the importance of being honest with employees. These themes were anticipated before the interview process due to the volume of references in literature each theme has.

Theme five identified from the interview process was the importance of empowering employees. Multiple participants identified empowering employees as a needed action to establish successful employee engagement. Leadership must be proactive in empowering their employees, as this provides the supported the employees need and facilitates the process of employee engagement (Anand, 2017). To effectively engage employees, leadership must take the action of empowering their employees (Prathiba, 2016). These findings from literature were similar to the findings from the interview process in identifying employee empowerment as a needed action by leadership to establish successful employee engagement.

Theme six identified from the interview process was the importance of conveying honesty. Multiple participants identified honesty as a needed action by leadership to establish successful employee engagement. To develop trust and engage with employees, leadership must be honest with their employees when making business decisions (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016). When leadership is honest with staff, a greater sense of trust is developed (Sahu et al., 2018). These findings from the existing literature were similar to the findings from the interview process in identifying honesty as a needed action by leadership to develop employee engagement.

Literature and the Missing Theme

The major difference between the findings from literature and the findings from the interview process was the incentive of improved company culture. During the interview process, participants were asked questions that were developed to identify the major incentives that come with successful employee engagement. Before the interview process, improved company culture was an anticipated theme due to its abundance in literature. Unfortunately, improved company culture was not identified during the interview process as a theme. Due to the fact that company culture was an anticipated theme, but not identified during the interview process, it was labeled as a missing theme.

Strong company culture will emerge as an incentive when employees are efficiently engaged with leadership (Potnuru et al., 2019). Antony (2018) also identified company culture as a major incentive that comes with improved employee engagement. Findings in the literature were expected to be similar to the findings from the interview process. Unfortunately, this was not the case, as improved company culture did not emerge as a theme from the interview process. This was the major difference between literature and the information collected from the interview process.

Relationship to the Problem

The problem that was examined in the study was the lack of knowledge pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement within selected YMCAs and Salvation Army offices, resulting in a decrease of collaborative tasks being carried out successfully. Exhaustive study of the current literature revealed two common themes as the major challenges that nonprofit leaders face when trying to engage employees. Park (2017) identified the gaps in information regarding employee engagement as being a major challenge that leaders face when trying to engage employees. Skinner et al. (2018) determined the major challenge facing nonprofit leaders when trying to engage employees is the availability of resources. These two common themes found in literature supported the findings from the interview process. This section of the research study examined the relationship between the problem being studied and the findings from the interview process.

Section two of the interview guide posed questions to the participants that centered around the most prominent obstacles each leader has faced when trying to establish leader-to-employee engagement. By asking such questions to the participants, which were leaders working for the selected nonprofits, the researcher was able to collect and code data to help identify common themes. Two themes emerged as the most prominent obstacles the leaders have faced when trying to engage with their employees.

The first theme identified was the availability of literature. The literature review within the study presented an exhaustive overview of the need for more literature regarding employee engagement. Researchers (Borah & Borah (2018; Owusu-Ansah, 2018; Ruck & Menara, 2017), have determined there are gaps in literature regarding employee engagement. This theme found in literature supported the findings from the study. Participants noted gaps in information are problematic when trying to engage employees. Participants identified this as a challenge because engaging with each employee varies and it would be beneficial to have more information available in order to address the challenges that come with employee engagement. Information found from the study of literature and the information collected from the interview process addressed the problem under investigation in the study.

The second finding that had a direct relation to the problem being studied is the availability of resources. Nonprofit leaders are tasked with providing more services with fewer resources available (Cronley & Kim, 2014). Additionally, nonprofit leaders must make business decisions with less available capital and resources (Bouek, 2018). The challenge nonprofit leaders face due to resource availability is one that has been emphasized in literature. The literature review provided an overview of studies that examined the challenges nonprofit leaders face due to having fewer resources available. Such a theme aligned with the theme found from the interview process. Participants of the study noted many challenges that come with having fewer resources available when trying to engage employees. From the interview process, challenges that were linked to resource availability with regard to employee engagement included less money for training, less money to pay employees, which makes them feel less valued, and other challenges. Data collected from the interview process, along with information from current literature, supported the exploration of the research problem.

Summary of Findings

The qualitative case study was developed to address the three research questions of the study. This was accomplished by conducting 12 in person interviews with leaders working for the selected nonprofits. To meet the eligibility requirements of the study, participants must have been 18 years of age or older and working in a leadership position for one of the selected nonprofits. Participants were asked the questions from the interview guide. From these interviews six themes emerged, and these six themes were:

Theme One: Commit to employees by involving them in business decisions.

Theme Two: Open communication with an employee eases the process of engagement.

Theme Three: More literature must be available in regard to employee engagement.

Theme Four: Leaders of nonprofit organizations face the challenge of trying to engage with their employees with fewer resources available.

Theme Five: Employee empowerment is an essential part of employee engagement.

Theme Six: Leaders must be honest with their employees.

Themes were identified during the coding process. Open coding and axial coding were utilized to identify themes after the interview process. The six themes identified addressed the research questions of the study, the problem of the study, and the purpose of the study. Additionally, themes that emerged from the interview process supported the findings in literature and the conceptual framework of the study. The summary of findings provided an overview of the themes identified in the study.

The three sections of the interview guide were developed to align with the three research questions. Each section of the interview guide was developed to address one research question. From part one of the interview guide, questions were developed to identify which techniques were successful when trying to establish employee engagement. Two anticipated themes emerged to address this research question, which were commitment to an employee and keeping communication open with employees. The themes of commitment and open communication were anticipated themes due to the emphasis literature placed on their importance in regard to employee engagement. Exhaustive study of the literature revealed that leaders must commit to their employees to improve the relationship with their staff (Gupta & Sharma, 2016). Additionally, leaders must be open with their communication to each of their employees to enhance the level of engagement. Findings from part one of the interview guide addressed the first research question of the study by identifying which techniques participants felt were successful when establishing leader-to-employee engagement.

Part two of the interview guide was developed to address the second research question of the study. Participants were asked questions developed to identify what the most challenging factors these leaders face when trying to engage with their employees. As a result, two anticipated themes emerged, which were the gaps in information available pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement and the challenges of having fewer resources available. Both emergent themes were anticipated due to the volume of references in literature each emerging theme had. Park (2017) identified gaps in information available as a prominent challenge leaders face when trying to engage with employees. Nonprofit leaders are also tasked with trying to serve their communities with fewer resources available (Cronley & Kim, 2014). Findings from part two of the interview guide helped to address the second research question by identifying the two major challenges nonprofit leaders face when trying to engage with their employees, which were gaps in information available and also resource availability.

Themes identified in part two of the interview guide also addressed the problem of the study. Participants identified the challenges of gaps in information pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement, and also resource availability. Participants identified these obstacles when asked questions that were developed to obtain information pertaining to the challenge's leaders face when trying to engage employees. The two emergent themes from the interview process, along with information obtained from data addressed the problem of the study and worked to create the call to action for the study.

Part three of the interview guide was developed to address research question three. Participants were posed questions developed to identify which actions or behaviors were needed to establish leader-to-employee engagement. Two anticipated themes emerged, which were employee empowerment and honesty. Participants identified that leaders must empower their employees to make them feel more valued, and they must also be honest with each team member. Actions identified by participants were anticipated due to the abundance of literature pertaining to the importance of employee empowerment and honesty when it comes to employee engagement. Empowering employees makes them feel more valued, which supported the process of employee engagement (Anand, 2017). Leaders must be honest with their employees, as employees will feel they are more valued when leadership is honest with them when making business decisions (Zajkowska, 2012). Findings from part three of the interview guide supported research question three by identifying which actions or behaviors are necessary for leadership when trying to establish leader-to-employee engagement. Themes identified were employee empowerment and being honest with employees.

The purpose of the study was to contribute to the current body of knowledge regarding leader-to-employee engagement. Information obtained from participants supported in addressing the purpose of the study. Participants provided responses that helped to identify techniques needed for successful employee engagement, challenges nonprofit leaders have faced when trying to engage employees, and the actions or behaviors needed by leadership to establish leader-to-employee engagement. From these responses, six themes emerged that supported the purpose of the study in obtaining information to contribute to the current body of knowledge pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement. Each theme identified was not only supported by multiple participants but also the existing literature pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement.

Application to Professional Practice

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the current body of knowledge regarding leader-to-employee engagement. There have been a number of studies that have examined employee engagement, but there was still a need for more research pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement (Juan et al., 2018). The collected data was used to expound on the current information available regarding leader-to-employee engagement. This section of the research study presents an overview on how the results from the study could be used to improve general business practices.

Improving General Business Practice

Data obtained from the participants of the research study revealed six themes. The six themes were presented in the findings section of this qualitative research study. Each theme comprises key components of leader-to-employee engagement, which directly impacts the field of leadership. This section of the research study provides discussion of the findings and how they could be utilized to improved general business practices.

Results obtained from the study provide more insight into which techniques nonprofit leaders have utilized successfully to engage employees. Participants were asked during the interview process which techniques they have utilized to develop employee engagement. From the interview process, two themes were identified. The first theme identified by the participants was the importance of committing to an employee. Participants noted that committing to an employee included providing the support the employee needs to be successful. The second theme identified from the interview process was the importance of strong communication with employees. Participants felt when they kept their employees informed, they are better equipped to handle organizational challenges. These findings from the interview process supported the findings in literature. Hanaysha (2016) determined leaders must commit to their employees in order for employees to commit to leadership. Kang and Sung (2017) found that when leadership keeps communication channels open with their employees, the employees feel more informed and are more likely to engage with leadership. Current literature supported the findings from the interview process in identifying the importance of committing and openly communicating with employees. A deeper understanding of the techniques needed to establish successful leader-to-employee engagement could be used to improve the current general business practices, as this could provide leadership with more information that they can use to better engage with their employees.

Results of the study were used to expound on current information pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement. Leader-to-employee engagement is a vital part of business success, but there is still a need for more literature (Juan et al., 2018). Employee engagement is becoming over generalized in both theory and practice (Anthony-McMann et al., 2017). More information is needed to provide clarity on the topic of employee engagement (Anthony-McMann et al., 2017). During the interview process, participants were asked questions that were developed to obtain a more in-depth understanding of leader-to-employee engagement. The data that was collect from the participants was presented in the findings section of the study. The information collected from the participants, along with the information provided in the literature review section of the study, worked to obtain a deeper understanding of employee engagement. A deeper understanding of employee engagement could be used to improve current general business practices, as this provides leaders with more information that they could use to better engage with their employees.

Results of the study identified which actions or behaviors nonprofit leaders should utilize to develop leader-to-employee engagement. Current literature identified honesty and employee empowerment as two actions or behaviors needed by leadership to establish employee engagement. Sharma et al. (2019) found leaders that act with honesty and integrity are more successful in establishing employee engagement. Prathiba (2016) found when employees are empowered, they are better equipped to overcome organizational challenges and be more likely to engage with leadership. These findings supported the findings from the interview process. Two themes identified from the interview process were the need for leaders to be honest with their employees and the need to empower their employees. The results of the study could improve general business practices by identifying which actions or behaviors leaders should exhibit to develop employee engagement.

Potential Application Strategies

An application strategy must be developed to integrate new strategies into business practices. Successful application strategies can contribute to an organization's success. This section of the research study presents potential application strategies that businesses can use to integrate the results of this study into their organization. Successful application of the results of the study can provide the organization with more in-depth information regarding leader-to-employee engagement. From this research study, an application strategy was formed. To apply the application strategy, four steps were presented to execute these actions.

Leadership must first obtain an understanding of the current status of leader-to-employee engagement within their organization. Leaders can distribute an anonymous survey to their employees to try and gather information from each employee regarding how they feel leadership is engaging with them. Surveys should remain anonymous so that employees can speak more freely and not feel their information can be used against them. The information collected from the survey provides leadership with information regarding how employees feel their leaders are engaging with them.

Step two begins after the data are collected. Once the data are collected it should be examined to identify common themes to create an action plan. Identification of the problems allows management to create an action plan to address these challenges. The action plan involves findings from this study, as current literature regarding leader-to-employee engagement has been strengthened with the addition of the results from this study. Information from the study could provide leadership with a deeper insight into employee engagement.

Step three is the application of the action plan. After themes have been identified and findings from this study have been used to support the action, the action plan can be implemented. This action plan should be comprehensive and should address all problems identified from the survey. Although, the process does not stop once the plan is implemented.

Step four is the continuous monitoring of the progress and ensuring accountability across all channels. Leadership must conduct more surveys to monitor the progress of the action plan. If the same problems are found in the surveys, adjustments must be made. This four-step action plan provided leadership with the steps needed to apply the findings from the study to their general business practices.

Summary of Applications to Professional Practice

By conducting this study, more information was obtained to contribute to the current body of knowledge pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement. This study presented information that could be used to improve general business practices. The data gathered from the interview process provided leadership with a better understanding of the techniques, actions, and behaviors needed to develop employee engagement. These practices could be applied to current business practices through the presented four-step action plan. This action plan included sending out anonymous surveys to employees, collecting the surveys and identifying common themes, creating an action plan to address these themes, and finally monitoring the progress of the action plan. Findings from this study could be applied to theory and also current business practices.

Recommendations for Further Study

There are a number of recommendations for further study in the field of leadership pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement. This qualitative research study was conducted within the nonprofit sector. The first recommendation for further research is to replicate this study within the for-profit sector. Doing so will provide a comparison between leaders of nonprofits and leaders of for-profits. This can help to expand the generalizable information of the study’s findings. The second recommendation for further research would be to replicate the study outside of Ohio. This study was limited to nonprofit leaders working in Northeastern Ohio. If the study were conducted outside of this area, a deeper understanding of leader-to-employee engagement could be obtained. This would help to expand the generalizable information found from this study. The third recommendation for further study would be to interview leaders working for different nonprofits. Leaders selected for this study worked for one of the selected YMCAs or Salvation Army offices. Organizations chosen for the study are discussed in section two of this study. If leaders that work for different nonprofits are interviewed, the results could be compared to provide a better insight into leader-to-employee engagement. A fourth recommendation for further study would be to replicate this study. If the study were replicated, more information could be collected, and a comparison could be created between the two studies. This would further expand the generalizable information found from this study.

Reflections

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to obtain information that could be used to contribute to the current body of knowledge regarding leader-to-employee engagement. The need for more information regarding leader-to-employee engagement was identified in literature (Park, 2017). To address this need for more information in literature, 12 in person interviews were conducted with leaders working for the selected nonprofits. Participants had to be at least 18 years of age and working in a leadership position for one of the selected nonprofits. From this process, the researcher grew both personally and professionally. Additionally, from this study there were also biblical perspectives that were identified.

Personal and Professional Growth

Through personal interactions with the leaders selected for the study, the researcher obtained insightful information that provided both personal and professional benefits. The researcher initially approached this as just a qualitative case study, and information gathered would only be used to address the purpose of this qualitative research study. This was not the case, as the researcher obtained so much great information from each participant. Participants not only provided information that was used for the study, but also provided techniques and insights that were eye opening to the researcher. This information opened the mind of the researcher to the many different ways in which a person can lead.

The researcher had worked in a leadership position for eight years at the time of the study. Even with this experience, the information gathered from the participants provided the researcher with an abundance of techniques, actions, and behaviors that a leader should utilize to develop successful employee engagement. The researcher was able to learn from the information gathered to try and establish strong employee engagement with employees. Overall, the researcher was able to grow both personally and professionally from the interactions with each participant.

Biblical Perspective

This qualitative research study has implications for businesses with a biblical framework. The business functions examined in this study were the facets of leader-to-employee engagement. The Bible provides many teachings on engagement, and this section of the study will present some of these teachings. Additionally, this section of the research study provides a Christian worldview on the business functions that were examined in the study.

A prominent finding from the interview process was the emphasis participants placed on being honest and showing integrity when it comes to engaging with employees. Participants felt when they were honest with employees it was easier to engage with them. The business function of being honest when developing relationships is one that is especially important from a Christian perspective. The Bible teaches us many wonderful lessons on engaging with others. One of these lessons is “Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good worked, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us” (Titus 2:7-8, ESV). A second lesson, “And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, and be able to teach, patiently enduring evil” (2 Timothy 24, ESV). These biblical lessons are relevant across all business functions, especially during the process of developing employee engagement.

Another common finding from the interview process was the importance of empowering employees. Participants noted that a major function of leadership is to empower employees. The Bible teaches us many great lessons on empowering others. A lesson from scripture is, “Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people” (1 Kings 3:9, ESV). This biblical lesson aligns with many quotes from the interview process. Participants stated the importance of providing employees with the necessary tools to be successful. This biblical lesson is relevant across all business functions, especially when leaders are trying to empower their employees.

Another theme identified from the research study was the importance of supporting others. Participants in the study felt that in order to develop successful employee engagement, they must provide supported to their employees. The business function of supporting others is one that has many biblical teachings. One teaching is, “Do not neglect others to do good, and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God” (Hebrews 13:16, ESV). This biblical lesson is one that emphasizes the importance of providing supported to others. This lesson is one that aligns with information gathered from the study, as participants placed a high importance on providing supported when it comes to engaging with their employees. A second biblical lesson regarding the importance of providing supported to others is, “Bear on another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2, ESV). These biblical lessons are relevant across all business functions, especially in the process of developing employee engagement.

The Bible provides us with many teachings that align with current business functions. Providing a Christian worldview to business is extremely important. Regardless of the situation a leader may face in business, they can turn to God for guidance. The Bible provides us many lessons that can be used to handle any challenge. One lesson is, “Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved” (Psalm 55:52). The biblical lessons identified in this research study are just a few of the many lessons God has provided us with.

Summary of Reflections

In reflection of the doctoral journey, many challenges and roadblocks were encountered along the way. These roadblocks were overcome through Christ’s guidance. Regardless of the challenges that were faced, scripture always provided the needed support to overcome these challenges. The researcher was able to grow both personally and professionally from the interactions with the participants selected from the study. The knowledge the researcher obtained from these interactions could be applied to all facets of life. Overall, the doctoral journey was one that is worth taking.

Summary and Study Conclusion

The general problem that was under investigation in the study was the lack of knowledge pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement within selected YMCAs and Salvation Army offices. To address this problem, 12 in person interviews were conducted with leaders working for the selected nonprofits. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded to reveal themes. Six themes emerged which were commitment, communication, the need for more literature, resource availability, honesty, and employee empowerment. Themes were consistent among the participants, which allowed the researcher to saturate the data and contribute in-depth information to the current body of knowledge pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement.

Existing literature, which was presented in the literature review of the study, provided support for the data collected from the participants. The combination of the support from literature and the data collected allowed the researcher to provide in-depth information to the current body of knowledge regarding leader-to-employee engagement. Incorporation of the results from the study could provide business leaders with valuable information regarding employee engagement, which could improve the general business practices of an organization. The conclusion of the study allows business leaders to obtain a deeper understanding of employee engagement, including an understanding of the techniques needed to establish successful employee engagement.

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Appendix A Interview Guide

The interview guide was developed with the intent to obtain information to address the problem being examined in the study. The interview guide is separated into three parts to correspond with the three research questions of the study. Part one focuses on questions relating to the leader's current level of knowledge pertaining to leader-to-employee engagement. Part two centers on questions pertaining to challenges the leaders faced when establishing employee engagement. Part three poses' questions regarding what leadership actions contributed to establishing strong employee engagement.

Script for Each Interview

Introduction

- The researcher introduces themselves and thanks each participant for volunteering their time.
- The researcher briefly discusses what the study is about to avoid any misappropriation.
- The researcher explains that the interview will be audio recorded for transcription later.
- The researcher explains how data will be secured and kept confidential.
- The researcher asks if the participant has any questions before beginning the interview.

Questions for the Participants

Part One

1. What techniques do you feel are best for developing employee engagement?
2. How did you identify which techniques were the most successful in establishing employee engagement?

    A. Was a trial-and-error procedure utilized?
3. How did you integrate successful employee engagement techniques into the organization?

A. What methods of communication were used to ensure engagement techniques were appropriately integrated?

4. What effect, if any, did the integration of the employee engagement techniques have on the success of the organization?

A. In your opinion, what is the largest advantage to establishing employee engagement in regard to operational success?

5. What techniques, if any, do you feel nonprofit leaders have to utilize compared to for-profit leaders in regard to employee engagement?

Part Two

1. As a leader what obstacles are most prominent when trying to establish employee engagement?

2. Does an employee's level of success contribute to better employee engagement?

A. Why or why not?

3. Does the organization's level of success contribute to better employee engagement?

A. How does a leader of a non-profit overcome the availability of resources when trying to develop employee engagement?

4. What effect, if any, does the amount of literature available regarding employee engagement have for nonprofits trying to develop employee engagement?

5. Do you feel nonprofit leaders face more challenges than for-profit leaders when it comes to employee engagement?

A. Why or why not?

Part Three

1. What leadership characteristics are most successful in developing employee engagement?

2. What actions must a leader take to establish employee engagement?

    A. Do these actions remain constant with each employee or does the leader need to evaluate each employee before determining which actions to take when establishing employee engagement?

3. If you could change any aspect of training managers within your organization on how to establish employee engagement what would it be?

4. How long does it take to develop and establish engagement techniques with each employee?

    A. Does it vary from each employee?

    B. What characteristics make it harder to engage with some employees over others?

5. Does the behavior of a leader impact the willingness of an employee to engage?

    A. What behavior should a leader administer when engaging employees?

Closing

• The researcher thanks the participant for answering the questions and taking part in the study.

• The researcher answers any remaining questions the participant has.

• The researcher provides contact information to the participant.

• The researcher obtains contact information from the participant for potential clarification of data.

• The researcher ends the interview.

Appendix B Recruitment Letter

Dear [Participant],

As a graduate student in the School of Business at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to examine leader-to-employee engagement, and the challenges associated with engaging employees. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older and employed in a formal leadership position within a nonprofit organization. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in an audio-recorded, in-person interview. It should take approximately 45 minutes to complete the procedure. Participants will also be asked to review their interview transcripts by email. Transcripts will be emailed to participants 1 week after the interview and will take approximately 20 minutes to review. The participants will be given a week to review and return the transcripts. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

In order to participate, please contact me at xxxxx@liberty.edu.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, please type your name on the consent document and return it by email to xxxxx@liberty.edu prior to the interview. If you have any questions, you are encouraged to reach out for clarification.

Participants will be provided with a $25 dollar gift card to GrubHub after the interview has been completed.

Sincerely,

Isaiah S. Stanford Doctoral Candidate

xxxxxxxxxx@liberty.edu

Appendix C Consent Form

Title of the Project: A qualitative case study examining leader-to-employee engagement techniques within selected nonprofits

Principal Investigator: Isaiah Stanford, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be working in a leadership role and over the age of 18. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to add to the body of knowledge regarding leader-to-employee engagement. Leader-to-employee engagement is explored through an in-depth study pertaining to engagement techniques in the selected nonprofit organizations.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

1. A face-to-face interview will be scheduled at the participant's place of employment. The interview will be semi-structured and be behind closed doors.
2. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes and it will be audio recorded to be transcribed later.
3. Participants will be asked to review the typed transcripts from the interview to ensure there is no misappropriation of the data. Participants will be asked to review and return the transcripts to the researcher within seven days.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include, leaders being able to examine the importance of employee engagement, and ways to overcome the challenges of effectively engaging employees.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risk to the participants in this study are minimal. A risk for the participant is fatigue. Each interview will be approximately 45 minutes and the participant run the risk of being fatigued. To address this risk, participants will be provided opportunities to break from questions if needed.

How will personal information be protected?

Electronic records of this study will be kept private on a password protected computer. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of coding. Interviews will be conducted at each participant's place of employment behind closed doors where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password protected computer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password protected computer for three years and then erased.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be provided a $25 dollar gift card to GrubHub at the completion of the interview, because of their willingness to participate.

What are the costs to you to be part of the study?

Participants will not be charged anything for participating in this study. Study participation is completely voluntary.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Isaiah S. Stanford. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at xxx-xxx-xxxx or xxxxxxxx@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. John Borek at xxx@liberty.edu.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515, or email at irb@liberty.edu

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

______________________________ ______________________________

Printed Subject Name Signature & Date