LEADERSHIP MODEL AND BEST PRACTICES FOR MEMBER ENGAGEMENT IN CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE

by

Gretchen Skok DiSanto

Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Many nonprofit membership-based associations experience poor levels of engagement which threatens member retention and their long-term survival. While leaders recognize that engaging members is critical to member retention, many association leaders struggle with identifying the best approaches for engaging members. This qualitative multiple case study focuses on member engagement and retention in two high-performing chambers of commerce with above-average member retention rates in Northeast Ohio. The study discovers effective strategies to engage chamber of commerce members, develops a leadership model for member engagement, and identifies best practices that chamber of commerce leaders should use to successfully engage members. Participants in the study included chamber leaders (executive directors, staff members, board members, and committee chairs) and engaged members. Using interviews, documentation, archival records, and direct observations, the researcher developed a leadership model comprised of six high-level leadership strategies that positively impact member engagement and, ultimately, member retention. The six high-level leadership strategies include building strong, trusting relationships; providing support; offering valuable benefits that align with members' needs and motivations; prioritizing strategic planning; building a welcoming and community-based culture; and effectively communicating. The researcher also developed a best practices guide for member engagement, which includes the six high-level leadership strategies and numerous accompanying sub-strategies designed to positively impact member engagement and retention.

Keywords: Chambers of Commerce, member engagement, member retention, leadership

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Dedication

To Mamaw, who literally worked in the basement for twenty years so that I could have the best high school and college education money could buy. To Papaw, for teaching me the importance of grit. To Dino and Siena, for giving me a reason. And to Big Dino, for always making me laugh and talking me off the cliff numerous times.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Member engagement in nonprofit associations is critical because engaged members serve as a source of organizational strength (Henczel, 2016). This study discovers effective leadership strategies that chamber of commerce leaders use to successfully engage members, which ultimately supports the retention of those members. This qualitative, multiple-case study includes a discussion of member engagement leadership strategies and sub-strategies utilized by leaders at two high performing chambers of commerce in Northeast Ohio. This study cross-analyses the leadership strategies at each chamber of commerce and provides a new leadership model and best practices guide for member engagement, which chamber of commerce leaders can use to strengthen member engagement efforts.

Background of the Problem

Leaders of nonprofit associations currently face challenging times. Changes in technology, demographics, and social trends make attracting, engaging, and retaining members in nonprofit associations very difficult (Sladek, 2011). These key shifts in the association environment necessitate a change in how association leaders ensure the survival and future success of their organizations (Sladek, 2011). Nonprofit association leaders need to consistently attract and retain members in order to ensure organizational survival (Dadush, 2017). However, association leaders also need to actively engage members, because leaders who ensure more member engagement opportunities ultimately strengthen their organizations (Gammel, 2010). Engaged members serve as a main source of organizational strength because they are more likely to renew their membership (Henczel, 2016). According to Bowman (2017), membership dues provide the largest revenue source for associations and account for 46% of total revenues, therefore leaders must retain current members. Engaged members also donate more (Hung &

Hager, 2020) and actively volunteer for associations in various capacities (Goolsby & DuBois, 2017). In contrast to the benefits of engaged members, research shows that high levels of inactive and unengaged members negatively impact associations (Newbery et al., 2013).

Significant research exists on engagement in the context of paid employees; however scholars have rarely studied the problem of addressing member engagement in nonprofit organizations (Stankiewicz et al., 2019). AbouAssi and An (2017) echo this observation and state that, despite the need to better understand member engagement, research on membership-based organizations and their interactions with members is scarce. Significant research also exists that documents the relationship between leadership and engagement in the context of paid employees (Popli & Rizvi, 2016). However, a review of the literature shows little research on the relationship between leadership and engagement in nonprofit associations. According to Nesbit et al. (2016), more research that addresses the leadership challenges and issues in paid staff and all-volunteer associations is needed. Lagaras (2016) works to address this gap in the literature by studying the impact of effective leadership on membership engagement in an all-volunteer professional association. Yet, Lagaras (2016) does not address leadership in a paid-staff association and only focuses on two dimensions of member engagement, organizational commitment, and participation. Finally, researchers have completed very little research, in general, on chambers of commerce, a specific type of nonprofit association and the focus of this study (Brochman & Lacho, 2015; Zee et al., 2017; Rohrlack, 2019).

Problem Statement

The general problem to be addressed is the failure of nonprofit association leaders to engage members, which results in decreased member retention. Many membership organizations and associations experience poor levels of membership engagement (Looi et. al., 2019). An engaged membership provides significant benefits to an association and its individual members (Wotherspoon & McCarthy, 2016). Simply put, an engaged member provides more value to an association (Martin, 2016). Engaging members is critical to member retention, but many association leaders struggle with identifying the best approaches for doing so (Wang & Ki, 2018). In fact, leaders in the nonprofit membership and association sector express that member engagement is their greatest challenge (Dadush, 2017; Wang & Ki, 2018). The specific problem to be addressed is the failure of chamber of commerce leaders within Northeast Ohio to engage members, resulting in decreased member retention. Wang and Ki (2018) state that proven methods to better engage members in associations would serve as an invaluable resource for leaders. Therefore, by addressing this specific problem, the researcher will assist chamber of commerce leaders in proactively supporting and increasing member engagement, an effort which will result in greater member retention and future organizational success.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case research study is to add to the body of knowledge by discovering effective strategies to engage chamber of commerce members, developing a leadership model for member engagement, and identifying best practices that chamber of commerce leaders should use to engage members. The specific demographic for this study includes leaders of chambers of commerce in Northeast Ohio. This study seeks to highlight the importance of member engagement in chambers of commerce and provide leaders with a leadership model and list of best practices that will assist them in strengthening their approach for supporting and increasing member engagement.

The literature recognizes that nonprofit organizations are especially challenging to lead (Freeborough, 2020). The literature also broadly recognizes that leadership serves as a critical factor of success in nonprofit organizations (Palumbo, 2016). In addition, scholars repeatedly state that a leadership deficit exists in the sector (Palumbo, 2016). Specifically within nonprofit associations, scholars posit that successful leadership differs from leadership in business, government, and other nonprofit organizations (Nesbit et al., 2016). Therefore, this study will assist in providing insight into effective leadership approaches in nonprofit associations that support member engagement and thus benefit the organizations.

Research Questions

The research questions in this multiple-case study seek to specifically examine the challenge of member engagement in one type of nonprofit association – chambers of commerce. The answers to the research questions will assist chamber of commerce leaders with developing an effective leadership approach for strengthening member engagement. The problem identified in this study pertains to the failure of association leaders to effectively engage members, which impacts member retention. As such, the researcher designed the research questions in order to better understand why leaders struggle with engagement and what specific actions chamber of commerce leaders currently take to effectively address the member engagement challenge. The questions also seek to understand how the actions of chamber of commerce leaders ultimately impact member retention. Lastly, the final research question identifies best practices that chamber leaders currently use to engage members, in addition to best practices mentioned in the literature that pertain to other types of associations.

A comprehensive literature review reveals that, in general, membership-based nonprofit associations face the engagement challenges of broad societal changes (Looi et al., 2019), rapidly changing member needs and expectations (Charney, 2015; Doyle & Oser, 2016; Soker, 2016), significant competition (Jacobs, 2014; Charney, 2015; Soker, 2016), generational challenges

(Sladek, 2011; Abel & Howard, 2017; Gorringe, 2017; Martin & Waxman, 2017), and insufficient resources (Hight, 2011; Soker, 2016). Scholarly literature does not address these challenges specifically in the context of chambers of commerce, therefore research question number one seeks to understand the current challenges and issues that chamber of commerce leaders encounter in engaging members. The researcher collected data to answer this question by completing interviews of chamber of commerce leaders and engaged members of the two study locations. The researcher also reviewed chambers of commerce documents to assist in answering this research question.

Scholarly literature also does not address the specific strategies that chamber of commerce leaders use to effectively engage members, therefore research question number two seeks to discover those strategies. Literature that primarily pertains to professional associations finds that strategies designed to build trust (Huang & Chen, 2016); provide support (Wang & Ki, 2018); meet needs and motivations (Ki & Wang, 2016); define organizational mission, vision, and goals (Soker, 2016); build cultures of community and belongingness (Sladek, 2011; Doyle & Oser, 2016); and ensure effective communication (Jones, 2016; Abel & Howard, 2017; Martin & Waxman, 2017) all effectively support member engagement. Therefore, by interviewing chamber of commerce leaders and engaged members of the two study locations, and by completing observations and document analysis, the researcher seeks to discover whether chamber of commerce leaders utilize those specific strategies in addition to any other strategies.

Many association members do not renew their membership due to lack of engagement (Rossell, 2016). Once again, scholarly literature that primarily pertains to professional associations finds that active member engagement influences the decision to renew membership (Coe et. al., 2016; Henczel, 2016; Ki, 2018). Research question number three seeks to understand how the engagement strategies used by chamber of commerce leaders supports member retention. The researcher generated data to answer this question by interviewing chamber of commerce leaders and engaged members of the two study locations.

While organizations such as the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives (2015) and for-profit consulting companies such as Hight Performance Group (2011 & 2019) and GrowthZone (2020) have some resources that pertain to member engagement, a comprehensive best practices guide, supported by scholarly literature, does not exist that addresses strategies to support all of the member engagement dimensions. As such, the fourth research question seeks to discover best practices currently used by the two high-performing case study sites, other nonprofits, and, specifically, membership-based nonprofits. The researcher compiled this data by interviewing chamber of commerce leaders and engaged members of the two study locations and completing a comprehensive review of recent literature (both scholarly and gray) that pertained to donor and volunteer commitment, engagement, and retention in nonprofits, as well as member commitment, giving, volunteerism, participation, and retention specifically in nonprofit associations.

The study's research questions are as follows:

RQ1. What challenges and issues do chamber of commerce leaders encounter in engaging members?

RQ2. How do chamber of commerce leaders effectively engage members?

RQ3. How do the engagement strategies of chamber of commerce leaders help support member retention?

RQ4. What are the best practices that chambers of commerce should use to help increase member engagement?

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study is a qualitative multiple case study research design. When determining the research design, the researcher first considered the most appropriate research method. Creswell and Poth (2018) state that the three research methods include quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. The quantitative method uses a deductive approach to test objective theories by examining the relationships among different variables (Basias & Pollalis, 2018). In comparison, the qualitative method includes both inductive and deductive approaches, and focuses on studying the meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to a problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A mixed method approach includes the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods (Ngulube, 2015). This section describes why the researcher chose a qualitative study and the applicable method and design.

Discussion of Method

The researcher conducted this study with a qualitative flexible design using the case study method; specifically, the researcher used a multiple case study design. Researchers use qualitative research when a problem or issue needs to be explored, the variables are not able to be easily measured, and a detailed understanding of the problem is needed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher addresses the specific problem of chamber of commerce leaders within Northeast Ohio failing to engage members and subsequent decreased member retention. The researcher chose the qualitative method as the best approach for this study because the qualitative method is an interpretive approach that explores the meaning that individuals attribute to a specific phenomenon (Harper & McCunn, 2017). The phenomenon of study in this research is member engagement in chambers of commerce. Qualitative research enables the researcher to capture the perspective and viewpoints of the study participants (Daher et al., 2017). Collecting and describing different views and experiences from study participants enabled the researcher to develop meanings and themes which explain the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Chamber leaders provided perspectives that enabled deep insight into the challenges and issues of member engagement, the most effective strategies for engaging members, and the impact of those strategies upon member retention.

The researcher did not choose the quantitative research method for this study because this method best examines the cause-and-effect relationships between numerous variables (Park & Park, 2016). The quantitative research method enables a researcher to verify a hypothesis using a large amount of data generated from questionnaires that include closed-ended questions that are then quantified (Basias & Pollalis, 2018). In this study, the researcher did not attempt to verify a hypothesis and the use of closed-ended questions would not have appropriately answered the research questions.

Mixed-method research studies use elements of both qualitative and quantitative designs (Creswell, 2014). The benefit of using a mixed-method design is that the combination of the two research methods yields a more complete understanding of the problem being studied (Creswell, 2014). This study included the examination of organizational documents and in-depth interviews with chamber of commerce leaders, which were designed to gain insight into how to engage members most effectively. Therefore, the use of quantitative measures, a component of mixed-methods research, would not have benefited this study.

Discussion of Design

This study uses a multiple case study design. Case studies explore a phenomenon in depth within the phenomenon's true context to achieve a deep understanding from those who experience the phenomenon (Yin, 2018). The use of a multiple case study design allows a researcher to explore the commonalities and differences in the cases (Lashgari et al., 2018). Multiple case studies result in increased depth and clarity of information (Arghode & Wang, 2016). In addition, the collected evidence from multiple cases yields more powerful results, and therefore, researchers consider the multiple case study approach to be more robust (Yin, 2018). The focus of this study explores how chamber of commerce leaders in Northeast Ohio effectively engage members, and therefore the multiple case study design is appropriate because numerous chambers of commerce operate in Northeast Ohio. Studying more than one chamber of commerce enabled the researcher to accomplish additional depth in the findings. In addition, the case study approach allowed the researcher to develop an in-depth description and analysis of the challenges with member engagement, the most effective strategies for member engagement used by leaders, and the impact of those upon member retention. Yin (2018) lists the six sources of evidence in multiple case studies as documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. In this study, the researcher used documentation, archival records, interviews, and direct observations.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), selecting case studies that illustrate varied perspectives on a problem is preferred, however, other acceptable options include using ordinary, accessible, and unusual cases. When selecting the two cases for this study, the researcher sought to include suburban chambers of commerce with above-average member retention rates, paid staff, and less than 750 members. In addition, the researcher focused on selecting chambers of commerce that could provide access. Due to COVID-19 related challenges, access was an issue as some chambers of commerce had significantly limited events (online or in person), committee meetings, and office hours. The researcher used comparison tables in order to complete a comprehensive comparison of the member engagement and retention similarities, differences, and unique characteristics of each chosen chamber of commerce. This step enabled the researcher to justify the choice of case study sites.

In addition to case studies, the other qualitative approaches include narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, and ethnographic research designs. The below four paragraphs discuss each of these research designs and why the researcher did not choose them for this study.

The narrative research design focuses on the lived and told experiences of an individual (Creswell & Poth, 2018). When completing narrative research, the researcher normally focuses on one or two individuals and gathers data from those individuals by recording their stories (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher then summarizes the individuals' experiences and the meaning attributed to those experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research requires in-depth interviews of numerous leaders in two different chambers of commerce and therefore the narrative approach is not appropriate.

The phenomenological research design seeks to understand the common meaning that a group of individuals has experienced with regards to a concept or a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenological research aims to distill the experiences of individuals with a phenomenon into a "description of the universal essence" of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75). While the researcher could have chosen this research design to study the phenomenon of member engagement, the researcher preferred to take a multiple case study approach because this approach provided an in-depth understanding of member engagement in a few select chambers of commerce.

The grounded theory research design enables a researcher to create or discover a theory (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By using this approach, researchers seek to understand a process, action, or interaction by generating a theory (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A major characteristic of grounded theory is that design approach focuses on a process or action that has specific steps that occur over a period of time (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study did not involve the development of a theory and therefore the researcher does not use grounded theory research design.

Finally, an ethnographic research design involves studying the shared values, beliefs, language, and behavior patterns of a specific culture-sharing group (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research design involves extensive participant observation with the researcher being immersed in the daily lives of those being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ethnography is not an appropriate research design for this study because chamber of commerce leaders are not part of a culture-sharing group.

Summary of the Nature of the Study

When completing research, researchers may choose from qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods research methodologies. The methodology that a researcher uses needs to appropriately fit the research problem and the study (Basias & Pollalis, 2018). The best methodology for this study is qualitative because the problem of leaders engaging members needs to be explored, the variables of this study are not easily measured, and a detailed understanding of the member engagement problem is needed in order for successful completion of the study. The multiple case study method is more fitting than the narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, or ethnographical methods because the study involves investigating more than one chamber of commerce and interviewing leaders in the different organizations.

Conceptual Framework

This qualitative multiple case study examines the effective strategies used by chamber of commerce leaders to engage members and results in the development of a leadership model and best practices guide for member engagement. The researcher utilizes the constructivism research paradigm, also referred to as interpretivism. In constructivism, researchers seek to understand the world around them (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Constructivists do not accept the notion that a single and verifiable reality exists, rather they believe in socially constructed and fluid multiple realities (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016; Kankam, 2019). Therefore, a constructivist seeks to develop numerous and varied subjective meanings; the constructivist accomplishes this by looking for complex views instead of seeking narrow meanings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research paradigm attempts to understand the interpretations of individuals regarding phenomena that they have experienced (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Because constructivists believe in multiple socially-constructed realities, they embrace the idea that different people will have different interpretations of phenomena (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). As a constructivist, the researcher seeks to understand the numerous interpretations of chamber leaders regarding their experiences with member engagement.

Discussion of Concepts and Theories

This study involves a complex analysis of member engagement dimensions, effective leadership strategies, the ultimate outcome of member retention, and various business-related theories that apply to nonprofit donors, volunteers, and association members. This section discusses these concepts and theories in detail.

Member engagement dimensions.

Membership engagement in nonprofit associations includes five main dimensions: commitment, internal participation, external participation, giving of money, and volunteering (giving of time) (Hager, 2014; Knoke, 1988). For the purposes of this study, internal and external participation have been combined into one dimension – member participation. This study seeks to understand challenges that impact these dimensions. The study also seeks to identify strategies that leaders use to positively support and impact each of the dimensions, thus ultimately influencing member retention.

Commitment.

Commitment pertains to the strength of an individual’s identification and involvement in a specific organization (Lagaras, 2016). When members of an organization develop internal psychological feelings of attachment and satisfaction with an organization, they display organizational commitment (Wang & Ashcraft, 2014). This commitment also includes a member having a sense of belonging within an organization (Stankiewicz et al., 2019). Committed members of an organization express pride in their membership, loyalty to the organization, and identify with the organization’s mission and goals (Stankiewicz et al., 2019). Subjective and cultural factors determine commitment, and therefore commitment depends upon individual characteristics of members, social norms, and customs (Stankiewicz et al., 2019).

Internal and External Participation.

Nonprofit associations offer various participation opportunities. In most associations, member participation includes attending professional development events, conferences, and networking events (Henczel, 2016). In addition, participation also includes accessing information provided by the association using various methods such as websites, social media channels, publications, emails, newsletters, and other communications (Henczel, 2016). In the case of chambers of commerce, the focus of this study, participation could also include the use of various chamber member benefits such as healthcare, office supply, and energy savings programs. Knoke (1988) states that participation also includes members' work on advocacy efforts for the association, such as the signing of petitions and/or contact with government officials. Finally, participation includes members' involvement in matters pertaining to the association, such as the completion of member surveys which leaders use for planning purposes (Lagaras, 2016).

Giving of Money.

The giving of money by members to an organization entails a charitable contribution in addition to members' payment of annual dues (Hager, 2014). Donations to associations support organizational sustainability, but also clearly indicate engagement in an organization (Hager, 2014). Giving provides a way for members to show their support for their association and the association's mission (Wang & Ashcraft, 2014).

Volunteering (Giving of Time).

Member volunteers play a critical role in nonprofit associations (Saitgalina, 2018; Wang & Ki, 2018). Many nonprofit associations have paid professional staff members, however, volunteers in associations provide considerable benefits (Gazley, 2012). Like with member giving, volunteering by members enables members to show support for their association and the association's mission (Hager, 2014). Members have the ability to perform numerous formal and informal volunteer roles in an association (Gazley, 2012). The various formal volunteer roles include serving on an association's board or various committees, organizing professional meetings and events, and playing roles in advocacy efforts (Gazley & Brudney, 2017). Informal volunteer roles include raising money for the association, recruiting other members, making presentations, moderating meetings, and/or assisting at various association events (Gazley & Brudney, 2017). In some cases, members also volunteer when they produce/co-create knowledge in partnership with the association (Gazley & Brudney, 2017).

Leadership Strategies.

The leadership model developed in this study, detailed in Figure 1, includes six leadership strategies used by leaders in nonprofit associations to engage members. The strategies include build strong, trusting relationships; provide support; offer valuable benefits that align with members' needs and motivations; prioritize strategic planning; build a welcoming and community-based culture; and effectively communicate. This model visualizes the answers to the study's research questions, which pertain to how chamber of commerce leaders effectively engage members and the best practices for engaging members. The below concept descriptions summarize the meaning and importance of the strategies.

Build Strong, Trusting Relationships.

Scholars advocate that trust serves as the foundation of any successful relationship and is essential for organizational success (Huang & Chen, 2016; Koohang et al., 2017; Thompson, 2018). Trust refers to the confidence between two parties, either individual or group, that each party will uphold commitments, display honesty, and not exploit the other party's vulnerability (Koohang et al., 2017; Mehmood et al., 2017). When parties trust each other, they believe that each party will serve the best interests of the other party (Huang & Chen, 2016). In the context of a nonprofit association, trust includes a member's confidence that the association and its leaders will act in the best interests of the member (Huang & Chen, 2016). According to Mehmood et al. (2017), trust serves as the variable with the highest potential to influence an individual's behavior and decision-making. Effective leaders cultivate trust in and among people by displaying behaviors that show competence, integrity, benevolence, and credibility (Thompson, 2018). In addition, leaders strengthen trust when they develop high-quality relationships with followers (Ozsunger, 2019).

Provide Support.

Organizational support refers to individuals' beliefs about the value that an organization places on the individuals' contributions and the care that an organization shows for the well-being of individuals (Malinen & Harju, 2017). Scholars have extensively studied perceived organizational support in the context of employees (Malinen & Harju, 2017). Wang and Ki (2018) also studied perceived organizational support and its relationship to volunteering and donation behavior in associations. Members who perceive that they receive support from an organization express higher levels of engagement and therefore are more likely to support their association by volunteering and giving funds (Wang & Ki, 2018).

Offer Valuable Benefits That Align With Member's Needs and Motivations.

Members engage less with organizations that do not meet their needs and motivations (Hung & Hager, 2020). Various public and private benefits provided by associations motivate members to participate and engage in associations (Hager, 2014). Therefore, association leaders must provide benefits that match member needs and motivations (Hager et al., 2016). Leaders can provide benefits that support member engagement by first recognizing and understanding which benefits satisfy needs and motivations, and then by offering those benefits to members (Ki & Wang, 2016).

Prioritize Strategic Planning.

Developing an organizational mission, vision, and effective goals as part of a strategic planning process supports member engagement (Looi et al., 2019). An organization's mission is its reason for existence (Daft, 2016) and the organization's vision is a clear image of the organization's future (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Goals consist of outcomes that the organization attempts to achieve (Daft, 2016). Leaders hold responsibility for ensuring that an organization has and pursues a stated mission, vision, and goals (Daft, 2016). In the context of employees, research has proven that individuals have stronger engagement when they feel a connection to the mission and vision of an organization (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Research has also shown that the transformational leadership style, which focuses on encouraging followers to connect with organizational mission, vision, and goals, results in strengthened follower engagement (Mayr, 2017). Therefore, setting organizational mission, vision, and goals is a critical element in the concept of engagement.

Build a Welcoming and Community-Based Culture.

Sauser (2016) describes culture as the personality of an organization and the system of shared beliefs and values of those associated with the organization. According to Graham et al. (2017), culture serves as one of the most important forces behind the success or failure of an organization. A strong and healthy organizational culture depends upon effective leadership, which shapes an organization's culture (Warrick et al., 2016). Ki and Wang (2016) define membership as "a sense of belonging to a group along with feelings of personal connectedness with others in the group" (p. 199). In some cases, those who join an organization do so with the desire to belong and play a part in a community (Milbourn, 2019). In addition to seeking a sense of belonging, individuals also expect to feel affiliation and acceptance in an organization (Fleming, 2018). Actions by leaders in nonprofit associations can result in a strong culture of community and belongingness that fulfills the expectations of those who join.

Effectively Communicate.

Communication plays a critical role in the effective functioning of any organization (Lagaras, 2016). In the communication process of an association, leaders, members, and stakeholders use upward, downward, and horizontal communication to share valuable information (Lagaras, 2016). Leaders can use communication to effectively engage members (Martin & Waxman, 2017). Communication styles of leaders positively impact the sharing of knowledge within an organization (Lagaras, 2016).

Member Retention.

Member retention occurs when members renew membership (Hager et al., 2016; Shi et al., 2017). Associations measure member retention by determining the proportion of members who continue their membership over a specific timeframe (Hager et al., 2016). Associations must place significant emphasis upon member retention, as lost members equate to less revenues for the organization, which negatively affects the financial management of the organization (Coe & Best, 2014).

Applicable Theories.

Numerous theories apply to the membership engagement concepts included in this study. This section summarizes the applicable theories, which include social exchange theory, social identity theory, organizational commitment theory, Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, and Herzberg's two-factor theory.

Social Exchange Theory.

According to social exchange theory, individuals and organizations are reciprocally interdependent (Malinen & Harju, 2017). The relationship between individuals and organizations has rules of exchange, which involve the organization providing needed benefits and the individual paying for those benefits (Malinen & Harju, 2017). Individuals will rationally consider the benefits and costs prior to making an exchange (Benevene et al., 2018). The exchange between individuals and associations will occur when the perceived benefits of membership outweigh the costs (Unnikrishnan et al., 2016). Members exchange dues, time, donations, and expertise for services and products provided by the association (Unnikrishnan et al., 2016). Examples of benefits that members receive from the exchange include monetary value, information, prestige, status, and appreciation (Unnikrishnan et al., 2016).

Social Identity Theory.

Social identity theory posits that individuals with similar values, attitudes, preferences, and experiences are drawn to each other (Ki & Wang, 2016). Membership in associations provides the opportunity for individuals to share opinions and attitudes with like-minded individuals (Ki & Wang, 2016). Through social identification, an individual develops a perception of being psychologically connected with a group's destiny (Wang & Ashcraft, 2014). A form of social identity is organizational identification, the degree to which an individual shares and identifies with the attributes that define an organization (Markova et al., 2013). Defining attributes include the organization's values, mission, and culture (Bauer & Lim, 2019). An organization can provide a means for an individual to define their identity and feel connected to the values, beliefs, and norms of an organization (Markova et al., 2013). This connection results in a feeling of oneness or belongingness (Markova et al., 2013). As individuals' identities become closely connected with organizations, they express more willingness to engage in behaviors that benefit not only themselves but the organization (Bauer & Lim, 2019). Organizational identification will affect individual's membership decisions (Unnikrishnan et al., 2016).

Organizational Commitment Theory.

Organizational commitment theory refers to an individual's attachment and sense of belonging to an organization (Erdurmazli, 2019b; Stankiewicz et al., 2019). Organizational commitment includes three types: affective, normative, and continuance (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). Yahaya and Ebrahim (2016) define affective commitment as the desire to remain part of an organization because of an emotional attachment. Researchers consider affective commitment a psychological state that results in an individual remaining in an organization because they desire to (Gilbert et al., 2017). Normative commitment is a desire to remain a member of an organization because of a sense of duty and obligation (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). Individuals may feel that they have either a moral or indebted obligation to remain connected to an organization (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). Continuous commitment is a desire to remain a member of an organization because of the costs involved in leaving the organization (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). For example, individuals may continue to participate in an organization because they will lose certain benefits if they leave (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory.

Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs theory is a psychological motivational theory comprised of five-stages: biological and physiological needs, safety needs, love and belongingness needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. According to the model, individuals only fulfill higher-level needs once their lower-level needs have been met (Maslow, 1954). Individuals may join, renew, and engage in organizations that fulfill their diverse needs (Wang & Ki, 2018).

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory.

Herzberg's two-factor motivation theory posits that two types of motivations for work-related needs and desires exist – motivation/intrinsic and hygiene/extrinsic (Unnikrishnan et al., 2016). This theory relates to Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory because the theory contends that individuals are not fully satisfied when their lower-level needs are met (Breslin, 2017). Based on the theory, motivation factors include achievement, recognition, the work, responsibility, advancement, and growth possibility (Alshmemri et al., 2017). Hygiene factors include organizational policies and leadership, relationships with superiors, interpersonal relations, working conditions, and salary (Alshmemri et al., 2017). Numerous researchers show the positive relationship between both motivation and hygiene factors and satisfaction with a job and an organization (Alshmemri et al., 2017). The results of these studies suggest that motivation factors are more important for achieving satisfaction with a job and an organization (Alshmemri et al., 2017).

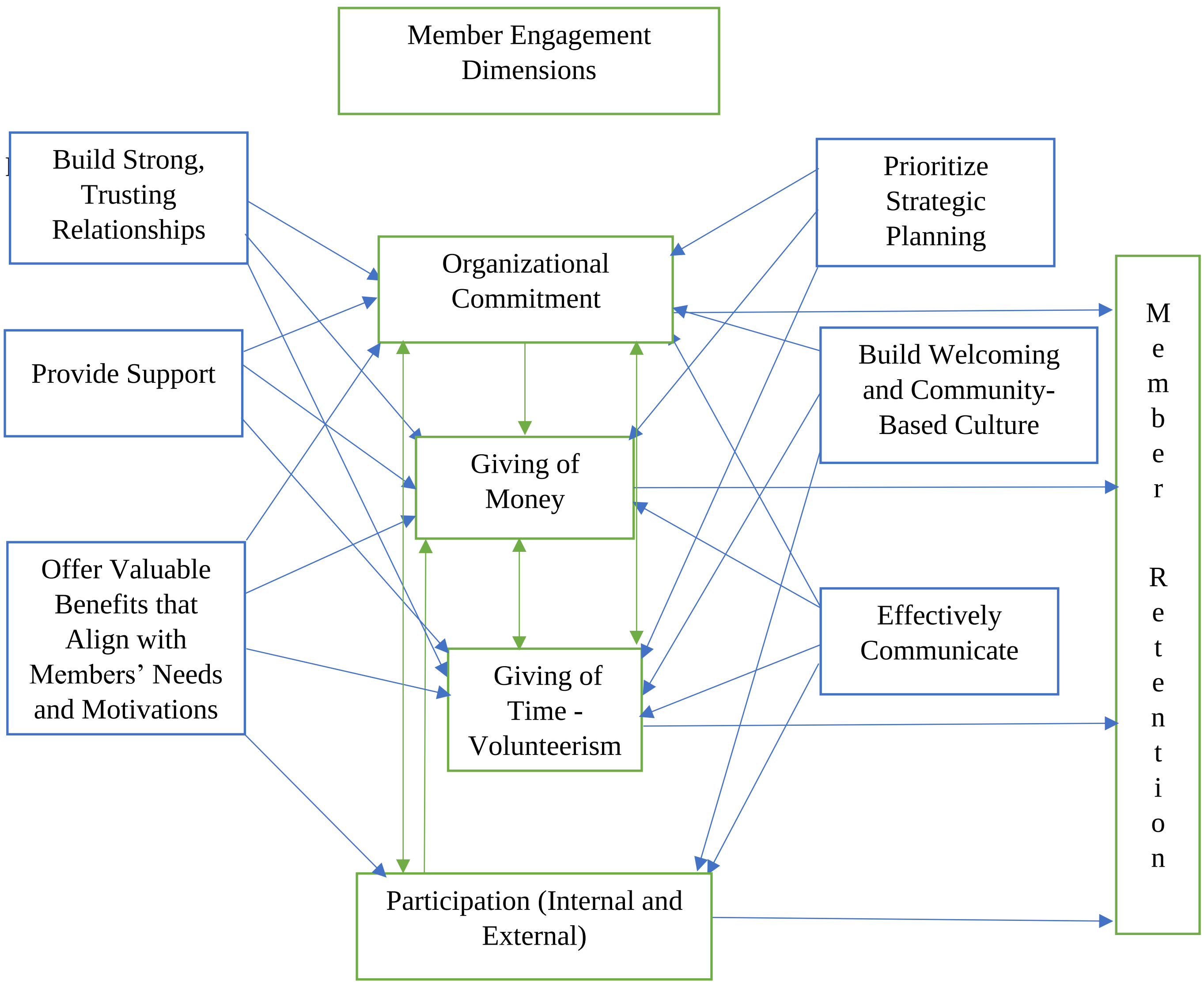

Figure 1. *Leadership model for member engagement in chambers of commerce showing relationships between concepts.*

Discussion of Relationships Between the Concepts and Theories

Relationships exist between the model's leadership strategies and the member engagement dimensions, between the four member engagement dimensions, and between the member dimensions and member retention. In addition, each of the theories that apply to this study relate to one or more of the four member dimensions. This section discusses the various relationships in the study's conceptual model.

Relationships Between Leader Strategies and Member Engagement Dimensions.

Building Strong, Trusting Relationships.

Scholars widely accept that trusting relationships yield the outcome of commitment (McAuley, 2019). When association members trust that the association acts in their best interests, they will express commitment to the association (Huang & Chen, 2016). Strong, trusting relationships also positively impact the commitment of volunteers in nonprofit organizations (Nencini et al., 2016; Senses-Ozyurt & Villicana-Reyna, 2016). In addition, scholars empirically prove that trust promotes giving to nonprofit organizations (Moon, 2017). In fact, research shows the linkage between trust and commitment to nonprofit organizations, as studies find that commitment significantly mediates the relationship between trust and nonprofit giving (Alhidari, et al., 2018; Liu, 2019).

Providing Support.

Perceived organizational support (POS) involves the perceptions that individuals hold with regards to the extent that an organization "cares about their well-being and values their contributions" (Huning et al., 2020, p.3). Scholars consider organizational leaders the primary source of POS because they make decisions that shape organizational policies and procedures and the organization's treatment of individuals (Huning et al., 2020). Empirical research shows that the POS of association members positively influences their attitude towards associations, which results in the members both volunteering and donating funds (Wang & Ki, 2019). Leaders need to promote perceptions of organizational support in the case of volunteers because affective commitment to an organization is predicted by perceived organizational support (McCormick & Donohue, 2019).

Offer Valuable Benefits That Align With Members' Needs and Motivations.

Associations must provide value to members (Stoffel, 2015). Association leaders can only provide that value if they know and understand the members' needs and motivations (Hopkins & Wasco, 2017). When members have expectations of the association that the association does not meet, this situation leads to less participation and nonrenewal (Newbery et al., 2016). Therefore, an effective strategy determines what members value most and aligns association benefits with those needs and motivations (Coe & Best, 2014). Members who perceive that their needs have been met by an association have a more positive attitude toward the association, which results in members giving and volunteering (Wang & Ki, 2018). Members with addressed needs display additional satisfaction and commitment to the association (Wang & Ashcraft, 2014). Specifically in the case of volunteers, leaders must understand the volunteers' motivations for volunteering in order to retain and engage them (Senses-Ozyurt & Villicana-Reyna, 2016; Mainardes et al., 2017; Benevene, et al., 2018; Saitgalina, 2018).

Prioritize Strategic Planning.

Engaging members requires that an association have a clear purpose that includes a mission, vision, and goals set during strategic planning (Soker, 2016). If the mission, vision, and goals are clear, association leaders can focus on delivering value to members (Soker, 2016). Leaders can then align strategic and operational focus with delivering on their core purpose (Soker, 2016). Some members will express a high level of commitment to an organization based on its purpose (Tschirhart & Gazley, 2014). In addition, an external motivating factor for donors includes clarity about the mission of an organization. Finally, an internal motivational factor that influences volunteers' involvement with an organization is their identification with an organization's purpose/cause (Mainardes et al., 2017). Volunteers will engage and stay in an organization if they believe in the organization's values and goals (Erdurmazli, 2019a).

Build a Welcoming and Community-Based Culture.

An association's culture significantly impacts the association's ability to attract, retain, and engage members (Sladek, 2011). Individuals have an innate desire to belong, therefore leaders need to create a welcoming culture of community and belongingness (Doyle & Oser, 2016). Members that feel belonging in an organization essentially feel a sense of community, which impacts their engagement including participation in the association (Lagaras, 2016). With regards to volunteers, the culture of an organization is paramount as volunteers will engage with an organization that has an appealing culture (Fleming, 2018). In addition, an organization's culture plays a vital role in the affective and normative commitment of volunteers (Erdurmazli, 2019a).

Effectively Communicate.

One of the most effective ways to engage members includes utilizing clear and effective communication (Jones, 2016). Using multiple methods of communication to share information with members results in securing member participation (Jones, 2016). With regards to member commitment, effective communication results in the building of trust, which drives commitment (Alhidari et al., 2018). Lagaras (2016) finds that leaders’ use of effective communication plays a key role in member commitment. Effective communication also results in engaging volunteers (Kang, 2016; Nesbit et al., 2018; Bauer & Lim, 2019; Milbourn et al., 2019). Lastly, effective communications with donors serves as a best practice to not only retain donors and engage donors, but to also increase donor giving (Naskrent & Siebelt, 2011; Alhidari et al., 2018).

Relationships Between the Member Engagement Dimensions.

Numerous relationships exist between the four member engagement dimensions. Members who actively participate in associations develop a stronger affiliation and commitment to the association (Markova et al., 2013). In addition, when members express commitment to an organization’s mission they express interest in participating in the organization’s activities (Knapp et al., 2019). Active participation in and commitment to an association also makes members more likely to give to the association (Wang & Ashcraft, 2014). Numerous studies also report a strong connection between giving and volunteering (Gazley & Dignam, 2010). Volunteers are more likely to give, and donors are more likely to volunteer (Gazley & Dignam, 2010). In fact, Gazley & Dignam (2010), finds that association volunteers are three times as likely to give to their association as non-volunteers. Finally, engaged and satisfied volunteers in nonprofits have higher levels of organizational commitment (Benevene et al., 2018). The inverse also holds true in that members are more likely to volunteer for their associations when they express commitment to the organization (Goolsby & DuBois, 2017).

Relationships Between Member Engagement Dimensions and Member Retention.

According to Rossell (2016), the three main reasons that association members do not renew membership include lack of return on investment for the cost of dues, lack of value, and lack of engagement. Dalton and Dignam's (2007) study of over 16,000 association members finds that an engaged member is much more likely to renew membership. Members who participate and find positive benefits to their participation will renew membership (Ki & Wang, 2016). Therefore, the conceptual framework of this study proposes that all four dimensions of member engagement result in member retention.

Relationships Between Theories and Member Engagement Dimensions.

Table 1 summarizes the relationships between the theories that apply to this study and the four member engagement dimensions. Social exchange theory pertains to each of the member engagement dimensions. According to social exchange theory, trust grows between leaders and followers as a result of high-quality relationships (Ozsunger, 2019). Scholars widely accept trust as an antecedent of organizational commitment (Liu, 2019), therefore social exchange theory plays an explanatory role in the achievement of organizational commitment. As previously discussed, social exchange theory involves an exchange between parties in which each party receives something of value (Inoue, 2016). The acts of donating money and time, and participating in association events and offerings involve an exchange between parties. In the case of giving, individuals give money to an organization and in exchange they gain some value or benefit from the organization (Inoue, 2016). This also pertains to volunteers who receive some value or benefit from organizations in exchange for them giving their time and expertise (Aboramadan et al., 2019). Finally, members make an exchange with an association when they participate in association events and offerings; the member exchanges their time and dues for the value and benefit that the association provides at the events and offerings (Unnikrishnan et al., 2016).

Social identity theory also pertains to each of the member dimensions. According to Bergami and Bagozzi (2000), affective commitment is one of the distinct aspects of social identity. Therefore, social identity theory links directly to achieving organizational commitment from members. As Markova et al. (2013) asserts, membership helps define one's identity, and Ki and Wang (2016) posit that individuals will consider themselves members of an association if they contribute to the community or invest resources such as time and money. Wang and Ashcraft (2014) contend that individuals behave in a way that aligns with the major aspects of their identity, and this explains why members who strongly identify with their associations are more likely to donate. With regards to giving of time, the concept of organizational identification, which stems from social identify theory, helps to explain the behavior and commitment of volunteers (Bauer & Lim, 2019). Finally, members will participate in association activities that allow them to promote their professional identities such as their distinctiveness and competence levels (Markova et al., 2013).

Organizational commitment theory pertains to three of the member engagement dimensions. In member engagement literature, the member engagement dimension of commitment refers to affective commitment, one of the three widely studied types of commitment in organizational commitment theory (Knoke, 1988; Hager 2014). Wang and Ashcraft (2014) find that members' commitment to associations drives their decisions to give to associations. Members who express commitment to an association also volunteer for that association (Goolsby & DuBois, 2017).

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory pertains to the member engagement dimensions of giving of time and money in associations. Wang and Ki (2018) find that members’ perception of need fulfillment and organizational support ultimately results in members’ positive attitudes towards the association, which then lead to members volunteering and donating funds. Therefore, as associations meet members’ various needs, the members will invest their time and money. With regards to volunteering, Maslow’s levels 4 and 5, status and self-esteem needs, and self-actualization needs, are relevant to motivating members to volunteer (Fleming, 2018).

The final theory that applies solely to the giving of time dimension is Herzberg’s two-factor theory. Various intrinsic and extrinsic factors motivate volunteers in associations (Gazley, 2012). Volunteering in associations offers members social, professional, instrumental, and charitable benefits (Gazley, 2012). In some cases, members will continue to volunteer in order to maintain these benefits (Gazley, 2012). Therefore, leaders must recognize the value of the various intrinsic and extrinsic factors in order to support continued member volunteerism (Fleming, 2018).

Table 1

Member engagement dimensions and applicable theories

Commitment	Giving money (donations)	Giving time (volunteerism)	Participation (internal and external)
Social exchange theory	Social exchange theory	Social exchange theory	Social exchange theory
Social identity theory	Social identity theory	Social identity theory	Social identity theory
Organizational commitment theory	Organizational commitment theory	Organizational commitment theory	
	Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory	Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory	
		Herzberg’s two-factor theory	

Summary of the Conceptual Framework.

The conceptual framework in Figure 1 illustrates the numerous concepts and the relationships between the concepts in this study. The core of the framework includes the four member engagement dimensions: commitment, giving of time (volunteering), giving of money, and participation. The framework posits that each of the six leadership strategies, which include build strong, trusting relationships; provide support; offer valuable benefits that align with members’ needs and motivations; prioritize strategic planning; build a welcoming and community-based culture; and effectively communicate, positively impact one or more of the four member engagement dimensions. Each of these dimensions then results in the desired outcome of member retention in associations. This study identifies the challenges involved with engaging members and the most effective leadership strategies that result in member engagement and, ultimately, member retention.

Definition of Terms

Chamber of commerce: A voluntary membership association comprised of businesses that offers numerous benefits to member businesses (Rohrlack, 2019).

Commitment: A psychological attachment to an organization (Hager, 2014).

Communication: The exchange of information, ideas, and feelings through either verbal or non-verbal methods (Hunjet et al., 2017).

Culture: The personality of an organization and the system of shared beliefs and values of those who are part of the organization (Sauser, 2016).

Giving: Optional financial contributions made to voluntary membership organizations by members beyond membership dues and fees (Gazley & Dignam, 2010).

Member: A business or individual that pays dues to belong to a voluntary membership association (Hager, 2014).

Membership: A sense of belonging to a group in addition to the feeling of personal connection to others in the group (Ki & Wang, 2016).

Member engagement: "The result of a member investing time and/or money in an association in exchange for value" (Trochlil & Budziak, 2016, p. 103). Member engagement in associations includes volunteering, contributing, attending meetings and other events, or actively participating in the association (Jacobs, 2014).

Member retention: The rate at which members remain within an organization (Shi et al., 2017).

Member satisfaction: A member's overall positive attitude towards an association (Ki & Wang, 2016).

Membership association: An organization organized under Section 501(c)(6) of the Internal Revenue Service's tax code, which include trade associations, professional associations, and chambers of commerce (Wang & Ashcraft, 2014).

Participation: The act of taking part in association activities and events, and accessing information through association publications, reports, social media channels, website, and other communications (Henczel, 2016).

Perceived organizational support: An individual's perception regarding the extent to which an organization cares about the individual's well-being and values the individual's contribution to the organization (Huning et al., 2020).

Strategic planning: A planning process used by organizations to determine what the organization wants to achieve and how to achieve those outcomes (Gratton, 2018).

Trust: The belief in the good will and good intent of another individual to act in a way that protects one's interests (Thompson, 2018).

Volunteering: Activities performed in formal settings in which an individual gives of their time to benefit others without pay (Walk, 2018).

Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations

Prior to completing research, researchers must understand the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study. Assumptions include beliefs that the researcher considers true, but the researcher cannot verify (DaCosta et al., 2016). Limitations of the study concern potential weaknesses that exist and are normally out of the researcher's control (Theophanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Finally, delimitations describe the study's boundaries or limits (i.e. scope) (Theophanidis & Fountouki, 2018).

Assumptions

The researcher makes four main assumptions regarding the study. First, the researcher assumes that all of the participants of the multiple case study answered questions truthfully and without bias. The researcher clearly explained to all interview participants that the researcher would not associate their names with the information that they provided. Because of this assurance of anonymity and confidentiality, the researcher assumes that participants felt that they were in a safe environment and therefore would not fear answering the questions honestly (Surmiak, 2018). Second, the researcher assumes that information on member engagement gathered from the participants fairly represents member engagement strategies of the total population of similarly-sized chambers of commerce in Northeast Ohio. The intent of choosing the two specific case studies was to understand member engagement strategies, and the researcher sought to include study sites that best represented similarly-sized chambers. Each case was carefully selected so that the individual case studies predicted similar results (Yin, 2018). Third, the researcher assumes that the information provided by engaged members fairly represents the perspectives of the total population of engaged members in the two chambers of commerce. The researcher used purposeful and quota sampling when choosing the participants/interviewees at each chamber of commerce so that the study group included a reasonable cross-section of people who represented the greater engaged membership group (Bolderston, 2012). Finally, the researcher assumes that the participants understood the interview questions as intended and that the participants asked clarifying questions if they did not understand the question. The researcher received feedback from numerous parties on the interview questions that were unfamiliar with the project prior to completing the interviews with the goal of eliminating any confusion or lack of clarity (Rosenthal, 2016).

Limitations

The first limitation of this study is that the two chambers of commerce included in the study operate in Northeast Ohio, and the results may have been different had the study been conducted in a different area of the United States. Despite this limitation, the researcher did use literature pertaining to numerous membership-based associations throughout the United States to develop the best practice guide for member engagement. The second limitation of the study is that, because the study includes only Northeast Ohio chambers of commerce, the researcher does not achieve data saturation. However, the researcher achieved data saturation in the study’s two chamber of commerce cases because the researcher continued to interview leaders and engaged members until participants introduced no new information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The third limitation of the study is that the study focuses solely on smaller suburban chambers of commerce rather than large urban area chambers of commerce. As a result, larger chambers of commerce may not significantly benefit from the findings. However, as previously mentioned, the substantial literature review on membership-based associations provides an excellent foundation for the development of the best practice guide for member engagement, which includes best practices that a broad range of chambers of commerce could use. The researcher chose to focus on smaller suburban chambers of commerce because they comprise the vast majority of chambers in Northeast Ohio according to staff at the Northern Ohio Area Chambers of Commerce (NOACC), an umbrella organization that serves all chambers of commerce in Northeast Ohio. Only two urban chambers exist in the area – COSE and the Greater Akron

Chamber of Commerce. Rural chambers are rare in the area, and according to NOACC staff, they have experienced significant membership struggles due to COVID-19 and some have ceased operations. The final limitation is that the presence of inherent bias is likely due to the focus of interviewing chamber leaders (executive directors and board members) and highly-engaged members. While it is impossible to eliminate bias from qualitative research, the researcher attempts to minimize bias by utilizing an effective study design, triangulation, and skepticism (Stake, 2010). Because of the small sample size of this study, readers should not consider the findings generalizable, however, the descriptive analysis and identification of best practices for member engagement may provide valuable insight to chamber of commerce leaders in other geographic areas and in larger-sized organizations.

Delimitations

The first delimitation of this study is that the researcher focuses on one type of nonprofit membership organization, namely chambers of commerce. The second delimitation is geographic in that the two selected chambers of commerce operate within Northeast Ohio. The third delimitation is that the researcher selects chambers of commerce that have an average member retention rate of greater than 86%. According to the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives (2019), the average rate of member retention in chambers of commerce is 86%. By choosing to study chambers of commerce with above-average retention rates, the researcher anticipates that the chambers' leaders use effective strategies for member engagement. Research shows that engaged members choose to retain membership (Coe et al., 2016; Henczel, 2016; Rossell, 2016). Finally, the study is limited to chambers with less than 750 active members in suburban areas. According to staff at NOACC, the majority of suburban chambers of commerce in Northeast Ohio have less than 750 members.

Significance of the Study

This section discusses the contribution of this research to the scholarly body of literature and to nonprofit association leaders. Firstly, the researcher provided information on how this study reduces gaps in the current literature and adds to the understanding and effective practice of member engagement, specifically, in chambers of commerce and, generally, in nonprofit associations. Secondly, the researcher made a connection between the leadership concepts in the leadership model framework for member engagement and Biblical principles. Finally, the researcher explained how this study applies to leadership.

Reduction of Gaps

In order to ensure organizational success, leaders of nonprofit organizations need to understand successful leadership models and best practices (McAuley, 2019). The nonprofit environment is becoming increasingly complex, and leaders must prepare to effectively guide their organizations to sustainability (McAuley, 2019). Member attraction and retention provides value for nonprofit associations, but leaders also need to focus on member engagement, as increased member engagement results in financial sustainability and a stronger ability to accomplish the association's mission (Gammel, 2010). Despite the importance of member engagement in nonprofit organizations, scholars rarely study the problem of member engagement (Stankiewicz et al., 2019). In general, research on membership-based organizations and their interactions with members is scarce (AbouAssi & An, 2017). In addition, Nesbit et al. (2016) advocates that more research needs to address leadership challenges in associations. Association leaders express that member engagement is their greatest challenge (Dadush, 2017), therefore this study seeks to assist association leaders in addressing that challenge. The development of a leadership model framework and best practices guide for member engagement will provide a valuable tool for nonprofit chamber of commerce and association leaders to strengthen both their leadership approach and their organizations. Given the fact that very little research has been completed on chambers of commerce (Brochman & Lacho, 2015; Zee et al., 2017; Rohrlack, 2019), studying two chambers of commerce and their member engagement approaches will fill a significant gap in the literature.

Implications for Biblical Integration

According to Keller (2012), on earth man serves the role of both a builder and gardener. As a gardener, man realizes the potential in the world, and as a builder man constructs a strong house that will last for generations (Keller, 2012). These analogies mean that man takes responsibility for what God has made and uses God's creation to benefit the world. Keller (2012) also states that man holds the role of a servant because the purpose of work is to serve the world and all those in the world. Scripture states, "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (*English Standard Bible, 2001*, 1 Peter 4:10). Nonprofit associations, including chambers of commerce, effectively serve as God's gardeners, builders, and servants. The leaders of these organizations endeavor to serve their members and provide them with benefits that strengthen their ability to provide value and service to their professions, businesses, and communities.

This study seeks to develop a leadership model framework and best practices guide that will assist chamber of commerce leaders, and other association leaders, in better serving their members via member engagement. The six leadership strategies included in the leadership model for member engagement all have a foundation in the Bible. Firstly, a strong message in the Bible includes the importance of trusting God as scripture states, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths" (*English Standard Bible, 2001*, Proverbs 3:5-6). In addition, scripture states, "The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him" (*English Standard Bible, 2001*, Psalms 28:7). This concept of trust must also extend to relationships that people have in their personal and professional lives. Man can use God as a model to learn how to effectively build trusting relationships with others. Those trusting relationships then benefit not only individuals, but also organizations.

The importance of providing support, meeting needs, and serving others also appears in the Bible. According to scripture, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (*English Standard Bible, 2001*, Ephesians 2:10). Jesus provides us the ultimate example of one who seeks to support and serve others. As scripture states, "And whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (*English Standard Bible, 2001*, Mark 10: 44-45). With regards to meeting needs, scripture reminds us that God will meet all of our needs: "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (*English Standard Bible,* 2001, Philippians 4:19). God provides man with skill sets that enable him to serve others and accomplish his vision for the world (Keller, 2012). Leaders in nonprofit associations can effectively serve the members of their organizations by supporting and meeting their needs.

Leaders also find inspiration for mission, vision, and goal setting in the Bible. *English Standard Bible* (2001) Habakkuk 2: 2-3 states, "And the Lord answered me: 'Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay.'" The Book of Proverbs also serves as a rich source that stresses the importance of planning. Consider *English Standard Bible* (2001) Proverbs 21:5 which states, "The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty" and *English Standard Bible* (2001) Proverbs 24:7, "Prepare your work outside; get everything ready for yourself in the field, and after that build your house." In order to best serve to their organizations, leaders must have a clear vision as to what they want to accomplish and then set goals that will enable them to accomplish that vision.

The Bible also addresses the importance of a community culture. *English Standard Bible* (2001*)* Hebrews 10: 14-15 states, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near." Associations, and specifically chambers of commerce, provide their members a community that can collaborate and support each other. A more effective and stronger community will exist if the community has a culture that values belongingness and collaboration. In addition, strength exists when individuals come together with others. Consider the scripture,

> "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken" (*English Standard Bible,* 2001, Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

Leaders should base a culture of community on love and scripture supports this by stating, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (*English Standard Bible*, 2001, John 13: 34-35).

Finally, the Bible also addresses and provides sage advice for effective communication. Consider *English Standard Bible (2001)* James 1:19 which states, “Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.” This scripture emphasizes the importance of first listening and then communicating, which according to Wang and Ki (2018) is critical in the leadership of associations. Scripture also states, “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear” (*English Standard Bible,* 2001, Ephesians 4:29). This scripture speaks directly to the importance of providing value in communications, which serves as a best practice in association communications (Jones, 2016).

Relationship to Field of Study

This study relates to the field of leadership because the study provides a framework that leaders in chambers of commerce and other nonprofit associations can utilize to effectively engage members in their organizations. Successful leadership in associations differs from leadership in business, government, and general nonprofit organizations (Nesbit et al., 2016). For example, association leaders have to address the numerous motivations and incentives of volunteers, donors, and members (Nesbit et al., 2016). Therefore, a leadership model framework and best practices guide for membership engagement will assist them in their efforts.

Summary of the Significance of the Study

This research study provides a model for chamber of commerce leaders to effectively engage members, however the results can apply to other membership-based organizations that seek to serve the needs of various members. The study assists leaders in practicing the most effective strategies that will support and increase member engagement in nonprofit organizations. Also, the study results contribute to the body of current literature on effective leadership practices in nonprofit associations.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

This study discovers effective strategies to engage chamber of commerce members, develops a leadership model for member engagement, and identifies best practices that chamber of commerce leaders should use to engage members. The development of the leadership model and best practices guide is the result of studying two high-performing chambers of commerce and a comprehensive review of literature pertaining to member engagement in nonprofit membership-based organizations. The researcher includes literature that addresses volunteer and donor commitment, engagement, and retention in nonprofits. The following section contains summaries of the literature on chambers of commerce, member engagement motivations in associations, and the four member engagement dimensions (organizational commitment, giving of money, giving of time/volunteerism, and internal and external participation). The literature review also includes a summary of engagement challenges in associations, the relationship between member engagement and retention, and leadership in nonprofit organizations and associations. Finally, the researcher discusses recent literature regarding each component of the leadership model and the associated best practices that support and increase member engagement.

Chambers of Commerce

A chamber of commerce is a nonprofit 501(c)(6) membership association comprised of business members (Noel & Luckett, 2014). Broadly speaking, membership associations include formally organized groups of various members who do not receive payment for their participation in the group (Tschirhart & Gazley, 2014). Membership associations also include private/nongovernmental and self-governing organizations (Bowman, 2017). The IRS tax code recognizes a broad sector of membership, trade, and mutual benefit associations under both charitable and noncharitable categories (Bowman, 2017). The 501(c)(6) organizational classification covers business leagues/associations, chambers of commerce, real estate boards, and trade boards (Bowman, 2017).

Chambers of commerce exist to further the interests of businesses by building a strong network of businesses and supporting their growth and success (Verbovskii et al., 2016). Chamber of commerce missions can vary, but in general they all focus on building and promoting communities, ensuring a pro-business climate, representing the voice of the business community, and reducing business challenges through networks (Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives, 2020). The literature recognizes chambers of commerce as catalysts for economic and business development, and leading partners in private sector economic initiatives (Braendle et al., 2016). Chambers of commerce members pay for membership in order to receive benefits solely provided to members (Noel & Luckett, 2014). Chambers of commerce benefits may vary by organization, but in general membership benefits include organizational credibility, information, discounts/savings, promotion and advertising opportunities, and networking (Verbovskii et al., 2016).

Chambers of commerce have a long history as the first chamber was founded in Marseille, France in 1599 (Verbovskii et al., 2016). In the United States, the first English speaking chamber of commerce was founded in 1768 in New York City (Verbovskii et al., 2016). Chambers of commerce developed as a result of constraints of the socio-economic environment (Braendle et al., 2016) and are very common in industrialized countries that have either a free enterprise or mixed capitalist system (Noel & Luckett, 2014). In some countries, such as the United States, membership in a chamber of commerce is voluntary, but in other counties such as some in the European Union, chambers of commerce are organizations whose membership and organization are required by law (Noel & Luckett, 2014). Membership numbers in chambers of commerce in United States communities significantly vary from a few dozen businesses to more than 20,000 (Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives, 2020).

In the United States, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce serves as the largest business federation, which represents over three million businesses of all sizes, industries, and locations (U.S. Chamber, 2020). According to the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives (2020), approximately 13,000 chambers of commerce operate in the world and 4,000 chambers of commerce operate in the United States with at least one-full time staff member. Volunteers solely operate thousands more chambers of commerce in the United States (Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives, 2020). Normally, a company purchases membership in a chamber of commerce rather than an individual (Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives, 2020). The company pays dues, normally determined by the size (revenue or employee count) of the member company, and then the chamber of commerce considers all employees of the company members (Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives, 2020).

Chambers of commerce service territories vary and are normally defined by the locations of the members' businesses (Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives, 2020).

As previously stated, the missions of chambers of commerce vary as do the utilized business models (Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives, 2020). Because of their 501(c)(6) tax status, many chambers of commerce support business activities such as publishing, trade shows, and insurance programs (Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives, 2020). Some products and services of chambers of commerce may also compete directly with for-profit businesses in their area (Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives, 2020). It is widely accepted that all chambers have revenue sources other than dues, including revenue generated from events (Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives, 2020). In general, according to ACCE (2020) reports, large chambers of commerce rely less on membership dues than smaller chambers of commerce.

Despite the importance of chambers of commerce in large and small communities, very little research has been completed on them (Brockmann & Lacho, 2015; Zee et al., 2017; Rohrlack, 2019). Lacho (2008) studied the standing government affairs or public committees and their activities in chambers of commerce in New Orleans. Lacho and Brockmann (2011) studied the promotion opportunities for small businesses using chambers of commerce and Lacho and Brockmann (2012) also studied the educational services provided by chambers, which included workshops, luncheon speakers, and formal networking events. Studies by Fok et al. (2013) and Lacho et al. (2015) found that chambers of commerce were not known by college students, and Lacho et al. (2015) then studied the extent of college students' knowledge of chambers commerce in urban and rural settings.

Member Engagement Motivations in Associations

Motivation refers to a psychological process that influences an individual's actions or behaviors (Deci, 1976). The motivations of individuals vary, but Deci (1976) broadly characterized them as either intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic motivations satisfy innate psychological needs, while extrinsic motivations include material rewards or interests that individuals seek (Li & Barbieri, 2019). In the field of business, scholars describe motivations as incentives, because those who work in business make decisions based on the benefits or rewards that they will receive (Li & Barbieri, 2019). The Logic of Membership concept was developed to explain the motivations behind participating in membership-based associations (Li & Barbieri, 2019).

The Logic of Membership.

The Logic of Membership includes the set of incentives that members seek when they join and participate in an association (Li & Barbieri, 2019). Bennett (2000) states that the Logic of Membership comprises two categories: the logic of service, which includes association benefits that meet members' requests and needs (i.e., private incentives), and the logic of influence, which includes the actions that associations take to serve the interests of the majority of their members (i.e., public incentives). According to Hager (2014), public incentives motivate member engagement and private incentives drive member engagement. Public incentives include normative expectations, such as setting professional standards for a field and lobbying on behalf of a field or cause (Knoke, 1988). Private incentives include economic, occupational, social, and informational benefits (Li & Barbieri, 2019). An economic benefit example includes increased revenues for members and an occupational benefit example includes access to professional contacts (Li & Barbieri, 2019). Social benefits include social and recreational activities that associations only make available to members (Knoke, 1988), while informational benefits include items such as data services, newsletters, conferences, and workshops that the association provides to members (Hager, 2014).

Markova et al. (2013) introduces an additional benefit of membership participation in the context of professional associations called symbolic benefits. Markova et al. (2013) state that membership establishes and reinforces the social and professional identify of members. Membership enables members to consider themselves part of an in-group, allows them to promote their distinctiveness, connects them to a well-defined community, and strengthens the feelings of belonging to a specific profession (Markova et al., 2013). However, Markova et al. (2013) point out that symbolic benefits may not successfully justify member engagement, and therefore, they suggest that private incentives, which they refer to as tangible benefits, justify members' participation.

Rather than ascribing to the Logic of Membership, Newbery et al.'s (2016) demand-side membership survey of local business associations identifies what they refer to as two bundles of benefits – instrumental and info social. Instrumental benefits include greater visibility to customers, new customer contacts, and improved reputation, while info social benefits include socialization opportunities, information exchange, peer support, access to local knowledge, a collective voice, and/or a sounding board for ideas (Newbery et al., 2016). In the specific context of chambers of commerce, Noel and Luckett (2014) also do not utilize the exact Logic of Membership model, but rather introduce the concepts of confidence benefits, social benefits, and special treatments. Confidence benefits include those benefits that help build a business' credibility in the community (Noel & Luckett, 2014). Rather than using the private and public incentives terminology, Noel & Luckett (2014) use the terms external social benefits and internal social benefits. External social benefits include chambers of commerce lobbying activities and general focus on civic and corporate responsibility, while internal social benefits include benefits that directly impact member businesses such as promotional opportunities, workshops, access to marketing data, website referrals, networking opportunities, and various business assistance programs (Noel & Luckett, 2014). Finally, special treatment benefits include chamber of commerce benefits that save members’ businesses money, such as health care discounts and credit card services discounts (Noel & Luckett, 2014).

Using the data from a national survey of 20 membership associations and their members, Knoke (1988) finds that members with public goods motivations have higher engagement in their associations. Knoke (1988) also finds that private incentives are either unrelated to association engagement or attract members who are unwilling to participate. Dalton and Dignam’s (2007) landmark empirical study on why members join professional associations, completed in partnership with the American Society of Association Executives, finds that public incentives have a higher importance rating than personal incentives for the study’s 17,000 participants. Hager (2014) follows up on Knoke’s (1988) study, and his study specifically looks at why members engage in their associations. Using a data set provided by the American Society of Association Executives, Hager (2014) finds that public and private incentives motivate members in two health care associations and three engineering associations to participate in the associations. Hager’s (2014) results illustrate that private incentives do not serve as universal motivators, while public incentives do motivate engagement in associations. Hager (2014) discovers numerous differences between the results for both types of associations, which means that association leaders should avoid overgeneralizing engagement motivations in different associations.

Markova et al. (2013) focuses on a large international professional association and finds that private incentives, which the study refers to as tangible benefits, strongly relate to member satisfaction and eventual member renewal. Markova et al. (2013) also finds that highly engaged members in an association express more satisfaction with their membership. Ki and Wang's (2016) study of members from 18 associations also finds that members' perceptions of public and private incentives, which the researchers refer to as professional and personal benefits, positively correlate with members' satisfaction, membership renewal, and recommending the association to others.

Noel and Luckett (2014) study member satisfaction and perceived value of chamber of commerce memberships and find confidence benefits as the most valued benefit for chamber of commerce engagement. Special treatment benefits serve as the second most important, followed by social benefits (internal and external). All four benefits of chambers of commerce significantly correlate with member satisfaction (Noel & Luckett, 2014).

As previously mentioned in the case of local business associations, Newbery et al. (2016) develop a model of two benefit bundles, instrumental and info social. Newbery et al. (2016) find that some business members seek both instrumental and info social benefits; Newbery et al. (2016) refer to these members as dual bundle members and state that they are the most satisfied with the business association. Other business members predominately interested in instrumental benefits (i.e., instrumental members), find less value in the association over time and express less satisfaction (Newbery et al., 2016). The third category of business members consist of habitual members who report the least amount of satisfaction with both types of association benefits (Newbery et al., 2016). The study suggests that these business members retain membership perhaps out of a sense of duty (Newbery et al., 2016).

Both Gammel (2011) and Jacobs (2014) advocate that association members engage with associations that provide them with value. Jacobs (2014) mentions real estate's "location, location, location" mantra and states that the mantra for associations ought to be "value, value, value." Members will perceive value if a match exists between the incentives offered by the association and the members' needs (Suter, 2018). Associations can provide value if they therefore understand the needs that motivate individuals to join and participate in an association (Jacobs, 2014). Only then can associations work to provide value across all levels of possible engagement with the association (Jacobs, 2014). Interestingly, Dalton and Dignam (2007) find in their empirical study of 17,000 association members that members' perception of value received from an association increases with member involvement/engagement, therefore associations must prioritize increasing member engagement. Finally, Ki's (2018) empirical study of members' intention to renew in a professional association finds that the value associations provide through incentives directly influences intentions to renew.

Member Engagement Dimensions

Knoke's (1988) early empirical study of engagement in associations categorizes member engagement into five main dimensions: commitment, internal participation, external participation, giving of money, and volunteering (giving of time). As previously stated, this study combines the internal and external participation into one dimension – member participation. The below sections discuss the literature on each of the engagement dimensions.

Commitment.

In the context of associations, commitment pertains to one's individual identification and involvement with an association (Lagaras, 2016). When association members express satisfaction with an organization and have psychological feelings of attachment, they are committed to the organization (Wang & Ashcraft, 2014). Those who express commitment to an association also have belief and accept the association's mission and goals (Lagaras, 2016). Commitment to the organization can take the forms of affective, normative, and continuance commitment (Hager et al., 2016). Affective commitment involves the degree of favorability the member holds towards the association, while normative commitment involves a sense of moral obligation to the association (Hager et al., 2016). Finally, continuous commitment pertains to the perception of loss that would accompany leaving the association (Hager et al., 2016).

Knoke's (1988) study of members from numerous associations studies the relationship between organizational commitment and association incentives and finds that members with a higher interest in public incentives display a higher level of commitment to the association. In addition to the connection with association incentives, scholars widely accept in the literature that leadership behaviors serve as an antecedent for organizational commitment (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). Member commitment in an association has been specifically linked to leadership behaviors. Lagaras (2016) studies the factors that support active engagement in a professional association for public accountants and finds that effective leadership of the association, a sense of community, and effective communication serve as a common influence for member commitment. According to Lagaras (2016), effective leaders foster an inclusive organizational culture where members feel like they belong, and this strengthens member commitment. In addition, effective leaders make communication a priority with members which also yields member commitment (Lagaras, 2016).

Organizational commitment in the context of volunteers also applies to associations, as volunteers play a critical role in associations. In general, scholarly literature on volunteer commitment in nonprofit organizations is growing (McCormick & Donohue, 2019). This is not surprising because volunteers can easily quit an organization and scholars widely agree that committed volunteers remain with an organization; therefore, organizational leaders want to understand how to facilitate commitment (Gilbert et al., 2017). In their empirical study of volunteers in a large nonprofit organization, McCormick and Donohue (2019) seek to understand the antecedents of both affective and normative commitment in volunteers. They find that personal importance, esteem-based need satisfaction, value-based need satisfaction, and perceived organizational support predicate affective commitment (McCormick & Donohue, 2019). A portion of these results align with Malinen and Harju's (2017) empirical study of nonprofit volunteers, which finds that perceived organizational support positively relates to organizational commitment. McBey et al.'s (2017) empirical study of volunteers in a large nonprofit organization also finds a positive relationship between perceived organizational support and organizational commitment, which in their study, is mediated by the self-expression of volunteers. With regards to the normative commitment of volunteers, McCormick and Donohue (2019) find that socialization experiences and congruence of the organization's mission and values with volunteers' personal values predicate normative commitment.

The literature on volunteer commitment also discusses the important role of leaders in fostering commitment. According to Erdurmazli (2019b), leaders hold responsibility for nurturing the commitment of volunteers. Erdurmazli's (2019b) study of volunteers in six nonprofit organizations confirms that a community culture developed by leaders results in both affective and normative commitment. Erdurmazli's (2019b) study finds that the use of servant leadership partially mediates the relationship between community culture and both affective and normative commitment. Servant leaders first seek to serve followers and their personal growth and development (Eva et al., 2019). The six main categories of servant leader behaviors include empowering and developing, humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, providing direction, and stewardship (Eva et al., 2019). A second study of nonprofit volunteers by Erdurmazli (2019a) looks at the relationship between servant leadership, the six types of volunteer motives (protection, value, career, social, understanding, and enhancement), and affective and normative commitment. Erdurmazli (2019b) finds that servant leadership behaviors have positive associations with all six volunteer motives and both affective and normative commitment attitudes. In general, numerous empirical studies show that servant leadership behaviors consistently result in organizational commitment (Eva et al., 2019).

Transformational leadership serves as a second leadership style that results in organizational commitment (Fleming, 2018). Fleming (2018) advocates the use of transformational leadership with volunteers as he posits that transformational leadership provides the necessary foundation for organizational commitment. Transformational leadership involves a person engaging with others and creating a connection that increases the level of motivation and morality of both the follower and leader (Northouse, 2016). Transformational leaders focus on being attentive to the needs and motivations of followers and actively work to help them accomplish their full potential (Northouse, 2016). Less research exists on transformational leadership in nonprofit organizations, however numerous studies of the for-profit sector highlight the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational commitment (Freeborough & Patterson, 2016; Freeborough, 2020).

Ethical leadership also positively impacts organizational commitment in volunteers (Benevene et al., 2018). Scholars define ethical leadership as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making" (Engelbrecht et al., 2017, p. 369). The principles of ethical leadership include respecting others, building community, manifesting honesty, serving others, and showing justice (Northouse, 2016). Benevene et al.'s (2018) empirical study of volunteers in numerous nonprofits finds that ethical leadership is positively associated with volunteers' affective commitment, which is explained by both direct and indirect factors.

While very little research, in general, exists on chambers of commerce, one study by Dawley et al. (2005) was the first to propose and test an organizational commitment instrument for volunteer chamber of commerce board members. Prior to the completion of Dawley et al.'s (2005) study, all organizational commitment research had focused on paid employees. Dawley et al. (2005) confirm that the constructs of affective, normative, and continuance commitment all apply in the volunteer area. While they find a strong applicability for affective and normative commitment with chamber of commerce board members, they determine that continuance commitment has less utility when considering chamber volunteers (Dawley et al., 2005).

Giving of Time – Volunteerism.

Each year, U.S. nonprofit organizations attract, engage, and manage millions of volunteers (York, 2017). Volunteers serve as a critical component of nonprofit organizations (Harp et al., 2017). Without the support of volunteers, many nonprofits could not continue their existing level of services and would most likely discontinue some services (Harp et al., 2017; Fleming, 2018). According to Bauer and Lim (2019), 85% of nonprofit organizations have few to no paid employees, therefore, organizational success and survival depends on volunteers (Fleming, 2018). Economic reasons largely drive the increased use of volunteers in nonprofits, but the use of volunteers has also increased in part because of demographic changes such as the retirement of baby boomers and value shifts among younger generations (Kolar et al., 2016). Volunteers provide nonprofits a wide range of services that contribute to almost every aspect of nonprofit operations (Kang, 2016). In addition to providing a valuable role in nonprofit operations, volunteers also deliver the benefit of reducing costs in an organization (Malinen & Harju, 2017).

Within nonprofit associations, members may perform numerous formal and informal volunteer roles (Gazley, 2012). In a formal volunteer capacity, association members can serve on an association's board or various committees, organize meetings and events, and contribute to advocacy efforts (Wolk, 2016; Gazley & Brudney, 2017). In an informal capacity, association members can serve as ad hoc volunteers that perform roles including fundraising, meeting moderation, member recruitment, writing of articles, and assisting at events (Wolk, 2016; Gazley & Brudney, 2017). Current association volunteers and leaders recruit the majority of association volunteers, but some members do answer a general call for volunteers (Gazley & Dignam, 2008). Note, however, that Gazley and Dignam's (2008) study of over 26,000 association members finds that few members proactively contact the association to offer assistance.

According to Gazley and Dignam (2008), the demographic profile of volunteers in the United States is fairly stable. Generally speaking, women volunteer more than men, as do married people more than single people (Gazley & Dignam, 2008). The strongest predictors of volunteering include socio-economic status and level of education (Gazley & Dignam, 2008). With regards to age, middle-aged volunteers volunteer more than younger or older volunteers, with the exception of teenagers (Gazley & Dignam, 2008). Family status also impacts volunteerism as those with very young children tend to volunteer less and those with school-aged children volunteer more (Gazley & Dignam, 2008).

Quaranta (2016) studies gender differences in volunteering in nonprofit organizations across the life course and finds that both men and women volunteer more for nonprofit organizations after they leave their parents' homes, but, following marriage and childbirth, women volunteer less than men. Gazley and Dignam (2008) specifically study volunteerism in associations and also find, in general, that men volunteer more hours than women. They also find that millennials and the youngest age groups in associations are the least likely to volunteer (Gazley & Dignam, 2008). Plus, married individuals and those with children living at home are more likely to volunteer (Gazley & Dignam, 2008). However, those with children at home are less likely to volunteer for an association and more likely to volunteer for family-oriented organizations such as schools, sports, and churches (Gazley & Dignam, 2008). Gazley and Dignam (2008) also find that men and women have different preferences with regards to volunteering choices.

No consensus in the literature exists on what motivates individuals to volunteer, and scholars commonly accept the existence of diverse drivers behind volunteerism (Aboramadan et al., 2019). For clarity of understanding and ease of analysis, many studies classify motivations into two categories, intrinsic and extrinsic (Mainardes et al., 2017). With regards to intrinsic motivations, volunteers contribute their time for both altruistic (charitable or other-serving) and instrumental (self-serving) reasons (Gazley & Dignam, 2008). Individuals may also volunteer because social factors such as a sense of belonging and interest in new connections and friendships motivate them (Saitgalina, 2018). The altruistic motivation of helping others is a common motivation for most individuals (Saitgalina, 2018). Senses-Ozyurt and Villicana-

Reyna’s (2016) mixed method study of volunteers in numerous nonprofits finds that a major motivating factor for volunteers includes the ability to serve others. However, volunteers commonly express both altruistic and instrumental motivations simultaneously (Gazley & Dignam, 2008). Instrumental motivations with association volunteers could include increased skills, professional connections, and increased visibility (Gazley, 2012). Gazley and Dignam’s (2008) study of over 26,000 association members finds that the ability to meet, work, and socialize with others along with using and enhancing skills is a key motivation of volunteers. In the context of associations, Gazley and Dignam (2008) stress that, because of mixed volunteer motivations, “volunteerism is best viewed as a pro-social rather than a self-sacrificial activity that benefits others, but does not restrict the volunteer’s own possible benefits” (p. 10). In the specific context of chambers of commerce, the intrinsic factors of altruism, self-fulfillment, personal and professional growth, community interactions, networking, and increased visibility motivate volunteers (Dawley et al., 2005).

Using volunteer member survey data from the American Society of Association Executives, Saitgalina (2019) seeks to better understand motivations of volunteers in professional associations. Saitgalina (2019) conducts an explanatory factor analysis of volunteer motivations, which yields four factors that contribute to volunteerism: social/altruistic (social acceptance, altruism, and compassion), personal/egoistic (recognition, need for belonging, and solving personal problems with volunteering), tangible/instrumental (career-focused, gaining advancements, and resume-building), and exploring/growing (personal growth and self-improvement). According to the study results, social/altruistic and exploring/growing factors most motivate and satisfy volunteers of professional associations (Saitgalina, 2019). In other words, association volunteers want to help others either because of social acceptance needs or for personal self-improvement (Saitgalina, 2019).

Extrinsic motivators also have an impact on an individual's willingness to volunteer and therefore leaders must not overlook these motivations (Mainardes et al., 2017). Mainardes et al.'s (2017) comprehensive review of previous studies finds that extrinsic motivations for volunteering include professional image, recognition from society, identification with other volunteers in the organization, organizational reputation, the act of being invited, resume differentiation, and organizational image/brand. Despite stating that leaders must not overlook these motivations, Mainardes et al.'s (2017) study of volunteers in three nonprofit organizations finds that the motivations behind volunteering are more strongly related to intrinsic rather than extrinsic factors.

A common problem in nonprofit organizations is the retention of volunteers (Senses-Ozyurt & Villicana-Reyna, 2016). Research shows that a third of volunteers stop working for an organization after a year (Senses-Ozyurt & Villicana-Reyna, 2016; Gilbert et al., 2017). Milbourn et al.'s (2019) study of volunteers who left one nonprofit organization finds that despite valuing their participation the volunteers no longer wanted to engage with the organization because of work overload and burnout, lack of autonomy and voice, alienation and cliques, a disconnect with the organization, and a lack of faith in leadership. Schreiner et al. (2017) also mentions burnout as a reason for losing volunteers in addition to the issues of role ambiguity, low program satisfaction, and low organizational commitment. If nonprofit organizations cannot minimize volunteer attrition, then they face the challenge of consistently needing to refill volunteer positions (Gazley, 2012).

Effective volunteer engagement offers a solution to nonprofit organizations' challenge of retaining volunteers (Harp et al., 2017). Scholars define volunteer engagement as a positive state of mind in which volunteers express full investment in and commitment to their roles in an organization (Alfes et al., 2016). Unfortunately, nonprofit organizations struggle to engage volunteers, in large part because of resource capacity issues (York, 2017). Work engagement in for-profit organizations has been frequently studied, however, literature on the work engagement of volunteers is scarce (Malinen & Harju, 2017). Nonprofit organizations ought to focus on volunteer engagement activities, as volunteer engagement results in volunteer commitment, satisfaction, and retention (Malinen & Harju, 2017).

Malinen and Harju's (2017) study of over 200 volunteers in numerous nonprofit organizations applies a distinction between job and organizational engagement of volunteers and seeks to understand the impact of both types of engagement on volunteer attitudes. Malinen and Harju (2017) find that both job and organizational engagement significantly correlates with volunteer satisfaction, commitment, and turnover intentions. Malinen and Harju (2017) also find that perceived organizational support significantly relates to the level of volunteers' organizational and job engagement, satisfaction, commitment, and turnover intentions. Contrary to Malinen and Harju's (2017) study results, Aboramadan et al.'s (2019) study of over 370 volunteers in various nonprofit organizations finds no relationship between perceived organizational support and volunteer engagement.

Alfes et al. (2016) also studies the impact of organizational support on over 1000 volunteers in a single nonprofit organization. Alfes et al. (2016) separates organizational support into two concepts: task-oriented support and emotion-oriented support. Task-oriented support consists of concrete support that assists volunteers to overcome any issues in their roles, while emotion-oriented support is that which elicits positive feelings from the volunteer (Alfes et al., 2016). Alfes et al. (2016) finds that voluntary engagement positively relates to task-oriented and emotion-oriented support. They also find that volunteer engagement positively relates to volunteer happiness and intent to remain (Alfes et al., 2016). Wang and Ki (2018) specifically study the relationship between perceived organizational support and member engagement in 18 associations and finds that members' perceived support from the organization motivates members to engage in volunteering with the associations. Finally, Harp et al. (2017) study the work engagement of 235 volunteers from three nonprofit organizations and finds that volunteers express less engagement if they encounter role ambiguity and organizational constraints.

Giving of Money.

Membership dues and fees from programs and services serve as the primary source of association revenues, however, associations have other important funding sources (Oh & Ki, 2019). According to Bowman (2017), gifts and donations from individuals comprise the third largest revenue sources for associations, accounting for 15% of total revenue. Associations welcome donations because they enable the association to broaden reach, program offerings, and services (Wang & Ashcraft, 2014; Hung & Hager, 2020). Unfortunately, Hager's (2014) study of engagement motivations in professional associations finds that slightly fewer than a quarter of members donate to their association. Gazley and Dignam's (2010) landmark empirical study on giving in associations is even more concerning, as they find that only 15% of members give to their association. Marginal engagement, dissatisfaction, or satisfaction with current incentives provided by the organization may result in this lack of giving, and therefore, members do not need further reinforcement of member identity (Hung & Hager, 2020).

Diverse motivations exist for giving to nonprofit associations (Moon, 2017; Liu, 2019). In the context of nonprofit associations, Gazley and Dignam (2010) find that members' motivations for giving do not materially differ from giving in the context of charitable nonprofits. Intrinsic or extrinsic factors may motivate individuals (Oh & Ki, 2019). With regards to intrinsic motivation, individuals will engage in giving in order to support organizations that reflect the values that they hold and because they care about the organization (Ki & Oh, 2018; Oh & Ki, 2019). Scholars refer to this self-explanatory motivation as altruism (Gazley & Dignam, 2010; Ki & Oh, 2018). When practicing altruism, donors expect that their donations will benefit others and the greater good of the association (Gazley & Dignam, 2010; Liu, 2019). With regards to intrinsic motivation, Ki and Oh's (2018) study of association members that used data from the American Society of Association Executives finds that individuals' intrinsic motivation positively affects a member's decision to give to their association and the amount of the member donation. Oh and Ki's (2019) study of members from six associations also finds that intrinsic motivation positively influences the donation amounts of members.

Extrinsic motivation for giving refers to doing something because the action results in other outcomes (Ki & Oh, 2018). This recognizes that some individuals will donate because the donation satisfies their psychological needs, but also their social needs (Ki & Oh, 2018). Literature discusses seven extrinsic motivations for donations which include trust, rewards and personal benefits, leadership and third-party influences, characteristics of the organization, environmental influences, characteristics of beneficiaries, and future interests (Degasperi & Mainardes, 2017).

Giving strongly depends on trust in an organization (Gazley & Dignam, 2010; Degasperi & Mainardes, 2017; Moon, 2017; Alhidari et al., 2018; Kassim et al., 2019; Liu, 2019). In an empirical study of over 2 million nonprofit donors, Liu (2019) finds that trust in nonprofits results in commitment to an organization and increased giving. This finding is consistent with Moon's (2017) empirical study of over 2,000 nonprofit donors in California, and Alhidari et al.'s (2018) study of over 1,000 nonprofit donors. The second extrinsic factor is rewards and personal benefits, which could include intangible gifts, such as public recognition or tangible benefits such as a small gift or tax benefit (Mainardes et al., 2016; Degasperi & Mainardes, 2017). The third extrinsic factor is leadership and third-party influences, which refers to individuals donating because they see other people whom they respect (either leaders or well-known individuals) donating to the organization (Mainardes et al., 2016; Degasperi & Mainardes, 2017). The fourth extrinsic factor pertains to characteristics of the organization, such as the organization's brand, image, credibility, mission, reputation, and transparency in accountability (Mainardes et al., 2016; Degasperi & Mainardes, 2017). The fifth extrinsic factor includes environmental factors such as commemorative dates, rules and regulations, the current economic situation, and the influence of employers (Mainardes et al., 2016; Degasperi & Mainardes, 2017). The sixth extrinsic factor is characteristics of beneficiaries, which refers to the characteristics of those who will benefit from the donation (Degasperi & Mainardes, 2017). The final extrinsic factor is future benefits, which refers to individuals being interested in donating to an organization because they hold membership in the organization, and they want to both remain in the organization and they may have need for additional services provided by the organization (Degasperi & Mainardes, 2017).

With regards to external motivations, Oh and Ki's (2019) study of association members finds that the extrinsic motivations of rewards and peer pressure plays a significant role in members' donation amounts. Oh and Ki (2019) conclude that when extrinsic factors influence a donation, immediate and tangible results follow, and, therefore, if members value extrinsic motivation, they will give more in order to increase positive outcomes. In contrast, Wang and Ashcraft's (2014) study of association members from numerous associations finds that the extrinsic motivation of a tax deduction did not influence members' decisions to give to their associations.

The literature also discusses the role of member satisfaction in giving. Wang and Ashcraft (2014) find that satisfied members, who would recommend their association to others, are more likely to donate to their associations. Gazley and Dignam's (2010) study also finds a relationship between satisfaction and member giving; they find that very satisfied members are four times as likely to give compared to a dissatisfied member. With regards to the amount of donation, Ki and Oh's (2018) study of association members finds that member satisfaction does not predict the generosity of members' donation amounts.

The length of membership also plays a role in member giving, as does gender, age, and education. Ki and Oh (2018) find that longer-term members are more likely to give; the study results of Oh and Ki (2019) and Wang and Ashcraft (2014) support this conclusion. Gazley and Dignam (2010) find that older members and those with greater education levels give more frequently to their associations. Wang and Ashcraft (2014) also address the role of age and find that the likelihood of giving increases with age. With regards to gender, Gazley and Dignam's (2010) study did not find significant differences between the giving of men and women with the exception that men were slightly more likely to give. However, Ki and Oh (2018) find that women donate larger amounts than their male association members.

The literature clearly established the relationship between volunteering and giving. According to Gazley and Dignam's (2010) study findings, volunteers are three times more likely to give to their association than non-volunteers. Wang and Ashcraft (2014) also find that volunteering for an association significantly influences the members' propensity to give to their associations. This is not surprising because volunteering for the association increases members' connection to the association's mission, values, and members (Wang & Ashcraft, 2014).

Three final aspects of member giving include perceived need fulfillment, organizational support, and solicitation method. Wang and Ki (2018) find that perceived need fulfillment and organizational support positively influence members' attitudes towards their associations, which results in them being more likely to give to their association. Finally, the solicitation method impacts member giving because, according to Oh and Ki (2019), the members' preferred solicitation type influences the amount that they choose to donate. Gazley and Dignam (2010) stress the importance of a strong solicitation strategy and that someone who members know and trust should solicit them. This mention of trust is consistent with the widespread notion that trust in an organization results in an increased donation amount (Liu, 2019).

The literature addresses numerous reasons as to why association members do not give to their association. According to Hung and Hager (2020), individuals may not give to an association if they believe that other sources, such as the government, adequately fund the association. Donors may also perceive that the executive compensation is too high and that they have already satisfied any donation obligations because they give to a capital campaign or because they pay for an annual meeting or event (Hung & Hager, 2020). Members may also not give because they pay for other association memberships or they have little to no exposure to giving in general, which is a learned behavior (Hung & Hager, 2020). In addition, members may lack the means to give and/or they simply have not been asked (Oh & Ki, 2019). Dalton and Dignam's (2007) study find that four out of five association members never give to their association because no one asked them to donate. In short, associations have a problem with failed donor strategies (Dalton & Dignam, 2007).

Participation.

Numerous participation opportunities exist for members within associations. Member participation includes attending orientations, professional development events, conferences, and networking events (Jacobs, 2014; Henczel, 2016). Members also participate in an association when they access information provided by the association such as websites, social media channels, publications, emails, newsletters, and other general communications (Henczel, 2016). The use of association affinity programs, which provide organizational discounts to members, also serve as an example of participation (Jacobs, 2014). Finally, participating in a focus group, interview, or research project (Jacobs, 2014), in addition to completing association member surveys (Lagaras, 2016) counts as member participation.

Henczel (2016) studies the participation of members in national library associations and finds that active member participation results in increased member skills and competence. These outcomes result from both formal and informal opportunities that the associations provide (Henczel, 2016). Participants in the study also report that positive outcomes of association participation include increased credibility and establishment of personal friendships (Henczel, 2016). Henczel's (2016) study also highlights the importance of communication in an association and its relationship with participation. The study finds that the effectiveness of member communications influences members' willingness and desire to participate in association offerings (Henczel, 2016). This finding aligns with Lagaras' (2016) study, which finds that effective communication significantly influences member participation in an accounting association. Lagaras (2016) also finds that effective leadership influences member participation.

Lagaras (2016) stresses the importance of leaders enabling members to participate in organizational decision-making via the completion of organizational surveys, the submission of comments, and the participation in association focus groups. By encouraging member participation, leaders may positively impact member satisfaction and commitment (Lagaras, 2016). Stankiewicz et al. (2019) studies the use of autonomous teams in a single nonprofit association as a means of increasing member participation. Leaders of the association encouraged members to participate in numerous self-directed planning groups for different association activities, and after a short period of time, the study finds that 10% of members had increased their participation with the association due to the new decision-making opportunity (Stankiewicz et al., 2019).

Engagement Challenges

Association leaders face numerous challenges when engaging members. First, broader societal changes have resulted in membership groups experiencing member attraction challenges and poor levels of member engagement (Looi et al., 2019). In his seminal work *Bowling Alone*, Putnam (2000) argues that the United States faces a decline in social capital, which threatens all associational activities. Positive interactions between individuals create social capital and the social capital concept closely relates to how individuals engage in civic and social affairs (Grimm & Dietz, 2018). Social capital encompasses community networks (both personal and groups), civic engagement (civic affair participation), civic identity (community sense of affiliation), and reciprocity and norms of cooperation (altruism and trust in the community) (Looi et al., 2019). Looi et al. (2019) conclude that this loss of social capital negatively impacts associations and their ability to effectively engage members.

Second, association leaders find in the current environment that members' needs rapidly change and members' expectations are increasing (Soker, 2016). Joining and participating in an association used to be "the right thing to do," but now members expect significant returns on their investment of time and money (Charney, 2015). An example of this includes increased member expectations of communication (Doyle & Oser, 2016). Because of technological advancements, members expect personalized communication and also communication that is "how they want, when they want, where they want, and about what they want" (Doyle & Oser, 2016, p. 7). Members also expect that their associations "know" them and will serve them by providing content, products, and services that meet their specific and unique needs (Doyle & Oser, 2016).

Third, significant competition exists for members' attention, attendance, time, and money (Charney, 2015). Competition comes in the form of other organizations, available online resources, and family commitments. All of these forms of competition compete for members' time, and some members will conclude that they simply do not have the time to actively engage (Jacobs, 2014; Abel & Howard, 2017). According to Soker (2016), a third of associations face increased competition from other organizations. Smaller specialty associations, in-house programming by consolidated corporations, and an extensive number of online resources and networking tools all compete with associations (Charney, 2015). Association leaders should not expect their members to belong to only one association, but they must prepare to differentiate their organization amongst the competition so that they can successfully engage and retain members (Jacobs, 2014). Associations also face significant competition from social media platforms, which enable individuals to organize, build communities, and network for little to no membership fees (Bonington, 2019). Beyond social media, the Internet also offers other online forums, networks, webcasts, e-libraries and more resources that can compete with traditional forums offered by associations (Gorringe, 2017). In addition, life course phases impact engagement in voluntary organizations as shown by Quaranta's (2016) study which finds that both marriage and having children negatively impacts women's involvement in voluntary organizations. In the specific case of volunteering in associations, Gazley and Dignam (2008) find that association members with younger children are more difficult to engage in volunteerism; however, Gazley and Dignam (2008) find that two-thirds of members with children still express interest in learning about flexible volunteer opportunities. Finally, two additional points that pertain to volunteerism include the fact that fewer Americans serve as volunteers (Grimm & Dietz, 2018) and the majority of Americans who do volunteer normally volunteer for only one organization at a time (Gazley, 2012). In contrast, Gazley and Dignam's (2008) study did find that, on average, association members volunteer for more than one organization, however, they reserve most of their volunteer hours for charitable community organizations rather than associations.

Fourth, association leaders struggle with engaging the younger X, Y, and Z generations, which have different needs, values, wants, and expectations (Sladek, 2011). Research shows that the four generations currently most active in associations, Generations X and Y, Boomers and Matures, have different perspectives on the most important benefits of associations, the reasons for joining, communication preferences, and targeting preferences (Abel & Howard, 2017). In short, different generations seek different engagement paths and want to connect differently (West et al., 2014; Charney, 2015). Consider in particular Generation Y, which holds a unique mindset regarding their involvement in associations (Gorringe, 2017). Generation Y members seek more of a community atmosphere, instant communications, leadership roles with less time commitment, and more informal involvement opportunities (Gorringe, 2017). Because of their unique perspective on association involvement, a new best practice for associations includes creating micro-volunteering opportunities for members, which allows members to get involved but not require a long-term commitment (Brazil, 2016). The next generations desire a true, authentic, and personal experience which requires association leaders to consistently innovate and challenge the status quo (Martin & Waxman, 2017). Association leaders therefore must consider generational differences when creating engagement opportunities for members (Dalton & Dignam, 2007).

Finally, association leaders oftentimes face insufficient resources (Hight, 2011; Soker, 2016). According to Soker (2016), 77% of associations list insufficient resources as an operational challenge. Some member engagement strategies require resources such as advanced technology solutions (Hight, 2011; Trochlil & Budziak, 2016) and formally organized and managed volunteer programs (York, 2017). In the case of technology, associations have been slow to embrace new technology in large part due to the resources required to purchase new technology solutions (Charney, 2015). As for formal volunteer programs, research has shown that a majority of nonprofit organizations lack volunteer engagement and management capacity due to limited resources (York, 2017). Insufficient resources also impact individual members who are less inclined to actively engage due to financial instability and negative economic trends (Hight, 2011; Jacobs, 2014; Gorringe, 2017).

Member Engagement and Retention

The main reasons for association members not renewing include lack of engagement, lack of return on investment, and lack of value (Rossell, 2016). Coe et al. (2016) study membership nonrenewals in a professional association and find that participation in association benefits, such as lobbying efforts, publications, and professional development discounts, significantly influences the decision to renew membership. Henczel's (2016) study of national library associations also finds that the level of members' engagement with association communications, products, and services directly influences their willingness and interest in retaining membership. Ki (2018) studies member renewal intentions of a large healthcare association and finds that key predictors of member renewal include dues value and member attitudes towards the association. Ki (2018) points out that positive member attitudes/satisfaction directly link to the benefits that members receive from their active participation. Markova's (2013) study of a large professional association also finds that members who express satisfaction with association participation intend to renew their membership. Finally, Ki and Wang's (2016) study of members from 18 associations again confirms that members' perceptions of benefits received from association participation positively correlates with renewal intentions.

Leadership in Nonprofits and Associations

Scholars widely accept that leadership serves as a critical factor of success in nonprofit organizations (Palumbo, 2016). Specifically regarding chambers of commerce, the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives' (2015) *Horizon Initiative Report* declares that leadership is the most significant factor that will contribute to a successful future of both chambers of commerce and their communities. Yet, very little research exists on leadership in nonprofit associations to help guide leaders (Nesbit et al., 2016). Leading a nonprofit organization significantly differs from leading a for-profit organization (Freeborough & Patterson, 2016). While effective nonprofit leadership shares some characteristics with the private sector, scholars agree that nonprofits require a unique leadership approach (Allen et al., 2017). The nonprofit sector needs a unique approach because nonprofits focus on cause rather than profits, rely heavily on volunteer labor and stakeholder donations, and offer lower salaries and limited resources (Freeborough & Patterson, 2016; Allen et al., 2017). Leaders in nonprofit organizations have responsibility for building a strong sense of community among followers, devising and implementing the organization's strategic direction, and effectively managing the organization's human, technical, and economic resources (Palumbo, 2016). The differences in leading nonprofits require that leaders adjust leadership styles in order to address the unique opportunities and challenges of nonprofits (Freeborough & Patterson, 2016).

Hodges and Howieson's (2017) narrative study of numerous leaders in nonprofits finds that leadership has various meanings among nonprofits leaders. Leadership involves maintaining the reputation of the organization, meeting ethical obligations, motivating and supporting others, creating a positive environment, and displaying personal qualities such as listening, empowering, authenticity, courage, respect, trust, and values (Hodges & Howieson, 2017). Their study also finds that nonprofit leaders primarily face five challenges: dealing with economic downturns, building collaborative relationships, remaining innovative and distinctive, building and developing capabilities, and reinforcing the legitimacy of the nonprofit sector (Hodges & Howieson, 2017). Specifically with regards to leadership in nonprofit associations, leaders must play the key role of facilitating the process of moving members from joining to belonging and then engaging with the organization (Dalton & Dignam, 2012). However, association leaders report member engagement as their greatest challenge (Dadush, 2017; Wang & Ki, 2018).

Leadership Strategies for Member Engagement

This study develops a leadership model and a best practices guide for member engagement in chambers of commerce. The below six sections discuss recent literature regarding each component of the leadership model and the associated best practices that support and increase member engagement.

Build Strong, Trusting Relationships.

According to Gammel (2011), strong and healthy relationships drive the highest-value opportunities for engaging members. Trust serves as the foundation of all healthy relationships (Huang & Chen, 2016; Thompson, 2018). Trust is essential to relationship-building and sustainment because trust promotes collaboration among individuals (Huang & Chen, 2016). In associations, trust refers to members' confidence that the association and its leaders will act in the best interest of the members (Huang & Chen, 2016). When members have trust in an association, they also have increased confidence in the offerings of the association, which results in a desire to continue a relationship with the association (Huang & Chen, 2016). Trust also results in stronger commitment to an organization (Alhidari et al., 2018; Crane, 2018; McAuley, 2019). The ultimate health of an organization depends on trust and leaders' abilities to build trust (Thompson, 2018). Without trust, an organization faces negative implications such as decreased profitability and efficiency (Thompson, 2018).

Trust and relationship quality impact both donor and volunteer behavior. Alhidari et al.'s (2018) study of nonprofit donors finds that trust in an organization significantly influences donors' intention to donate and donors' actual donation behavior, therefore organizations must build positive and trustworthy relationships with donors. In the context of associations, Hung and

Hager (2020) and Oh and Ki (2019) also suggest the strategy of building strong, trusting relationships to support member donations. While Nencini et al.'s (2016) study of volunteer engagement in four nonprofits does not specifically address the importance of trust, the study's findings show that the quality of volunteer relationships with others in the organization plays a key role in sustaining volunteer satisfaction and retention with the organization. Kang (2016) also studies volunteer engagement in one nonprofit and based on the study results he suggests that organizations consistently engage in relationship cultivation in order to support volunteers' identification with organizations. When trust is present in an organization, a positive environment exists for volunteers which ultimately impacts volunteer satisfaction and retention (Dal Corso et al., 2019).

Huang and Chen (2016) specifically study the antecedents and outcomes of member trust in numerous professional associations. Their study finds that the associations' reputations, and internal and external networks facilitate increased member trust (Huang & Chen, 2016). Reputation refers to the overall member perception of the associations' past actions and future prospects (Huang & Chen, 2016). Internal networks refer to members' individuals relationships within a bounded community, and the external networks include members' relationships with outside resources connected to associations (Huang & Chen, 2016). Therefore, the study results illustrate the importance of members' internal and external relationships in associations for building member trust (Huang & Chen, 2016).

Numerous models exist for building trusting relationships (Thompson, 2018). A widely used model includes the three dimensions of ability, integrity, and benevolence (Alhidari et al., 2018). Ability refers to the assessment of an individual's knowledge, skills, and competencies (Thompson, 2018). Scholars associate a higher level of perceived ability with a greater chance of earning customer trust (Alhidari et al., 2018). Integrity refers to the degree to which an individual adheres to a set of acceptable principles and ethics (Thompson, 2018). Finally, benevolence refers to the assessment of an individual's concern for another's welfare beyond any egocentric motives (Alhidari et al., 2018). Using this model as part of his theoretical framework, Thompson (2018) studies leader behaviors that build trust and finds that six behaviors nurture organizational trust: trusting in the collective wisdom of others, respecting diverse perspectives, willingness to debate issues when opinions differ, using strong listening skills, promoting collective responsibility, and responding positively when conflict or disagreement exists.

Crane (2018) developed a holistic stakeholder trust model that also used the trust dimensions of ability, integrity, and benevolence in addition to three other trust dimensions that included responsiveness, voluntary action, and transparency. Responsiveness refers to the ability to understand and quickly respond to stakeholders' needs, and voluntary action refers to acting of your own will rather than in an obligatory manner (Crane, 2018). When individuals base their actions on their own volition, they convey trustworthiness (Crane, 2018). Finally, transparency occurs when organizations share clear and accurate information with stakeholders (Crane, 2018). Crane (2018) advocates that the addition of responsiveness, voluntary action, and transparency to a trust model further supports the building of trust between organizations and their stakeholders.

Provide Support.

As previously mentioned, perceived organizational support significantly relates to organizational commitment in volunteers (Malinen & Harju, 2017; McBey et al., 2017; McCormick & Donohue, 2019). Specifically in associations, Wang and Ki (2018) also find that members' perceived support from their association motivates members to engage in volunteering. Therefore, by using strategies to increase perceptions of support, leaders succeed in encouraging engagement (Malinen & Harju, 2017). Leaders can utilize Alfes et al.'s (2016) concepts of task-oriented and emotion-oriented support to effectively engage volunteers.

Task-oriented Support.

Task-oriented support assists volunteers in overcoming problems, and options for providing task-oriented support include a thorough introduction to roles, specific guidelines, resources, and guidance from staff or other volunteers (Alfes et al., 2016). Leaders may best accomplish an introduction to roles by providing a formal volunteer orientation, which scholars consider a volunteer management best practice (Kolar et al., 2016; Harp et al., 2017; Fleming, 2018; Nesbit et al., 2018). The orientation should include information on the association's structure and governance; mission, vision, and strategic plan; goal of the committee and the committee's work plan (Wolk, 2016). Orientations can take place in person, via webinar, or by phone (Wolk, 2016). The orientation provides members with the opportunity to directly engage with leaders, provide feedback, and ask questions (Wolk, 2016). Orientations also provide a means to effectively socialize new volunteers, which, according to McCormick and Donohue (2019), enhances organizational commitment.

Guidelines that support volunteers include written documents, such as procedures and job descriptions (Gazley & Dignam, 2008; Breslin, 2017; Harp et al., 2017; York, 2017) and board/committee charges and work plans (Wolk, 2016). Procedures and job descriptions clarify volunteers' roles by clearly communicating tasks and expectations (Harp et al., 2017). These documents assist in reducing role ambiguity, which supports the development of organizational commitment (McCormick & Donohue, 2019). A board/committee charge is a document from the association’s board of directors that provides direction and guides the committee’s activities (Wolk, 2016). The committee work plan then lists a series of activities that tie back to the board/committee charge (Wolk, 2016). Once leaders have provided formal guidelines, they must fully delegate power and authority to volunteers, as this empowerment supports the development of organizational commitment (Fleming, 2018). Research also shows that empowering volunteers is associated with volunteer engagement (Cohen, 2009; Traeger & Alfes, 2019).

Resources and guidance for volunteers are numerous. First, organizations can provide legal protections (liability protection and insurance) for volunteers (Gazley & Dignam, 2008; Breslin, 2017; York, 2017). Second, organizations can lessen organizational constraints by providing necessary equipment and information (Harp et al., 2017). Third, organizations should provide formal training and development opportunities beyond an orientation for volunteers (Kolar et al., 2016; Breslin, 2017; Harp et al., 2017; Malinen & Harju, 2017; Nesbit et al., 2017; York, 2017; Walk et al., 2018). Finally, Gazley and Dignam (2008) suggest providing small stipends or expense reimbursements to support volunteer involvement.

Emotion-Oriented Support.

Emotion-oriented support elicits positive feelings from volunteers (Alfes et al., 2016). Options for providing emotion-oriented support include providing networking opportunities with other volunteers and paid staff, feedback, appreciation, mentor support, and awards and recognition (Alfes et al., 2016). Networking opportunities could include special networking or social events, such as private meals at an annual conference (Wolk, 2016). Organizations demonstrate the value of a volunteer’s presence by also providing feedback and sincere appreciation (Abel & Howard, 2017; Mayr, 2017; McBey et al., 2017; Nesbit et al., 2018).

Associations effectively show appreciation by using visual designations at events such as volunteer ribbons or pins, including volunteer names in association publications, sending personal correspondence from leaders, and providing complimentary access to events or publications (Wolk, 2016). Showing appreciation is also a best practice for engaging donors in nonprofits (Naskrent & Siebelt, 2011). Finally, providing awards and formal recognition of volunteers is a best practice (Senses-Ozgurt & Villicana-Reyna, 2016; Abel & Howard, 2017; York, 2017; Walk et al., 2018).

Offer Valuable Benefits That Align With Members' Needs and Motivations.

According to Hung and Hager (2020), members engage less with organizations that do not meet their needs and motivations. As previously discussed in this literature review, various public and private incentives/benefits that associations provide motivate members to participate and engage in associations (Hager, 2014). Jacobs (2014) posits that nothing is more important in the association world than association leaders having a deep understanding of the needs of members in the context of their current challenges and the solutions that associations can provide. By understanding members' needs, leaders can better identify the motivations behind both joining, but also engaging (Jacobs, 2014). Once leaders understand member needs and motivations, they can provide association benefits that match and satisfy those identified needs and motivations (Ki & Wang, 2016). As Wang and Ki's (2018) study finds, when members perceive that their association has met their needs, they have a positive attitude towards their association and their motivation to engage in volunteering and donating funds increases. Members' needs and motivations consistently change, therefore members expect associations to adapt to their evolving situations (Sladek, 2011; Barnes & Nelson, 2014).

Listening to members is one of the most effective ways to ensure that leaders know and meet members' needs (Coe et al., 2016; Soker, 2016). A well-recognized best practice in associations includes creating formal feedback mechanisms for members (Newbery et al., 2016). The Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives (2015) argues that leaders must use robust feedback mechanisms to ensure the survival of chambers of commerce. Formal feedback systems include periodically surveying members regarding their needs and preferences (Wang & Ki, 2018). Potential survey approaches include surveying after events, with membership renewal reminders, and at the end of the year (Fabbri, 2019). Associations can also hold focus groups and personally reach out to members to understand their needs (Jacobs, 2014; Hight, 2019). However, Jacobs (2014) cautions that associations most likely will not receive effective feedback if they ask members about products and services that the association should offer that do not exist today. A more effective approach seeks to understand the current solutions to members' challenges, which then provides an effective context for anticipating members' future needs currently unrecognized by members (Jacobs, 2014). Gorringe (2017) advocates that surveying members is not enough because additional value exists in understanding your members' audience and therefore leaders should use broader surveys.

In addition to completing member surveys, focus groups, and phone calls, Jacobs (2014) advocates creating member profiles when new members join. Unfortunately, many associations do not collect information on their members beyond title, industry, and general contact information (Jacobs, 2014). The creation of more detailed member profiles enables associations to think of their members in terms of interests, attitudes, needs, and motivations (Jacobs, 2014). Jacobs (2014) suggests asking members about hobbies, interests, life stage, technology preferences, personality traits, donation behavior, and various psychographic questions that address leadership, collaboration, membership, attitudes, and beliefs. Once leaders gather this information, they better understand members on a personal level, which enables leaders to develop membership categories that enable members to select the benefits that meet their needs (Jacobs, 2014).

With regards to volunteers, the literature repeatedly discusses the importance of leaders understanding volunteers' needs and motivations in order to effectively develop engagement and retention strategies (Kolar et al., 2016; Senses-Ozyurt & Villicana-Reyna, 2016; Harp et al., 2017; Erdurmazli, 2019a). Like with association members, well-accepted best practices for volunteer engagement include surveying and holding focus groups in order to understand volunteers' needs and motivations (Kolar et al., 2016; Harp et al., 2017). Leaders can also identify this information during the volunteer recruitment process by asking the questions "why do you want to volunteer" and "what outcomes do you expect from your volunteering experience?" (McCormick & Donohue, 2019, p. 2596). Once leaders have awareness of volunteer needs and motivations, they can provide appropriate benefits which may include presenting the "opportunity to express personal value, increased understanding, career or social advantages, or self-esteem and emotional protection" (Breslin, 2017, p. 17). For example, if altruism motivates a volunteer, leaders should provide details to the volunteer on the outcome of his or her service (Gazley & Dignam, 2008). In contrast, if developing personal connections motivates a volunteer, leaders should provide additional networking opportunities for the volunteer to build personal connections (Gazley & Dignam, 2008).

Because association members' needs and motivations vary, Gammel (2011) advocates the use of an open-minded approach when identifying and offering diverse benefits and engagement opportunities. From a participation standpoint, best practices in the context of chambers of commerce include offering numerous social media platforms for engagement, providing a variety of networking opportunities in face-to-face and virtual formats, and creating specialized interaction opportunities for members with similar needs and interests, such as Women's Council, Young Professional, Solo-Entrepreneurs, and Industry Roundtable Groups (Hight, 2011). With regards to volunteering, Wolk (2016) suggests that associations offer numerous formal and informal volunteer engagement opportunities that enable members to feel that they actively contribute to the association and its mission.

Prioritize Strategic Planning.

Leaders can effectively support member engagement by developing an organizational mission, vision, and goals. The main purpose of associations includes advancing a cause based on a common mission; therefore the mission is foundational to success (Dalton & Digman, 2007). Ideologically, members hold every association accountable for achieving its mission (Soker, 2016). Organizational mission will drive some members' level of commitment (Tschirhart & Gazley, 2014), and organizational mission motivates both volunteers (Mainardes et al., 2016; Degasperi & Mainardes, 2017; Erdurmazli, 2019a) and donors (Mainardes et al., 2017) to engage. Plus, specifically in the case of associations, volunteers (Gazley & Dignam, 2008) and donors (Gazley & Dignam, 2010) find satisfaction by having the opportunity to connect with the association's mission. By having a clear vision of what the association desires to accomplish in the near future, leaders are better positioned to bring diverse stakeholders together (Soker, 2016). Finally, clear goals enable leaders to know exactly what the association wants to accomplish (outcomes) and how to accomplish those outcomes (Soker, 2016). Having clear goals also helps ensure that leaders do not waste limited organizational resources on activities that do not contribute to meeting member needs and providing value (Soker, 2016).

GrowthZone's (2020) annual association survey results of over 300 association leaders found that 16% of those surveys attributed increased member engagement to having a deliberate strategy and focus for the association.

An additional benefit to having a mission, vision, and goals is that having a clear focus assists leaders in positioning their associations among competitors (Coe et al., 2016). As previously mentioned, associations currently face increased competition from many exterior sources (Charney, 2015). Jacobs (2014) states that having a "laser-sharp" focus enables associations to strengthen their brand and deliver on promises made to members, which is critical if members consider membership in competing associations. In addition, the clear focus can assist in differentiating the association from competitors, which may enable increased member engagement and donations (Hung & Hager, 2020).

Strategic planning is the process that leaders use to identify an organization's mission, vision, and goals (Gratton, 2018). The strategic planning process yields a written plan that drives action, but the strategic planning process also provides an excellent way to engage stakeholders including volunteers and donors in determining the future of the organization (Gratton, 2018). With regards to associations, Noble et al.'s (2016) summary of a strategic planning process conducted by the Association of Leadership Educators states that involving members in the strategic planning process creates an additional opportunity for member engagement and provides value in setting effective priorities and strategies for the association.

With regards to associations' goals, Gammel (2011) advocates the importance of having specific member engagement goals that leaders successfully achieve by developing and implementing a member engagement plan. A member engagement plan details how the association will move members from low engagement opportunities, such as viewing association content on a website or social media site, to mid-level engagement opportunities, such as attending an event, to, eventually, the highest engagement level which includes leadership positions, volunteering, and substantial donations (Gammel, 2011). Dalton and Dignam (2012) refer to this approach as an engagement ladder, which, if properly planned, can move members with weak associational connections to the top of the ladder culminating in service as a board member. Jacobs (2014) also advocates that associations create engagement goals, however, with regards to engagement ladders, she stresses that not all members want to climb the engagement ladder. Some members find high satisfaction with low engagement opportunities and will retain their membership so long as the association offers those low engagement activities (Jacobs, 2014). Despite the value that Jacobs (2014) and Gammel (2011) find with engagement plans and goals, Advanced Solutions International's (2019) survey of 350 association leaders finds that only 25% of reporting associations have engagement plans.

According to Soker (2016), only 17% of associations have specific measurable goals that link to organizational mission and vision statements. Soker (2016) stresses that stated association goals must be measurable so that an association can track its success and accomplishment of stated goals. Associations must measure what matters most and this will differ based on the association (Soker, 2016). However, if association leaders carefully choose metrics, they will drive effective performance outcomes and ethical operational standards (Soker, 2016).

Build a Welcoming and Community-Based Culture.

According to Sladek (2011), organizational culture plays a significant role in an association's ability to attract, retain, and engage members. Numerous changes have occurred within the association world in the last few decades, but one constant includes the fact that members want to participate in a community, and they want to feel a sense of belonging (Doyle & Oser, 2016; Milbourn, 2019). This is not surprising because Ki and Wang (2016) describe membership in general as a sense of belonging to a group, in addition to feeling connected to those in the group. Members value positive, engaging, service-oriented, and community focused cultures (Sladek, 2011). Those who take part in an organization also want to feel affiliation and acceptance (Fleming, 2018). Therefore, leaders must create and support a culture that values community and belongingness (Doyle & Oser, 2016).

Organizational leaders largely shape an organization's culture because of their roles in decision-making and setting strategic direction (Sladek, 2011; Warrick et al., 2016). According to Whetstone (2017), leaders by virtue of their position have the most powerful means to embed and support a desired culture. Leaders influence culture by their choice of leadership style, chosen strategies and practices, and their values (Warrick, 2017). With regards to values, the establishment of an organization's core values is the start of building a culture (Graham et al., 2017). Therefore, in the context of associations, core values ought to support the establishment of a strong, welcoming, and collaborative community that values belonging.

The literature discusses numerous styles of organizational cultures (Cmelikova, 2017; Groysberg et al., 2018). Groysberg et al.'s (2018) cultural styles include caring, purpose, learning, enjoyment, results, authority, safety, and order. Caring cultures focus on positive, trusting, collaborative, and supportive relationships. The caring culture has the advantage of resulting in a sense of belonging (Groysberg et al., 2018), which makes a caring culture an excellent fit for associations. Purpose cultures embody altruism and focus on significantly contributing to a cause, while enjoyment cultures express playfulness and a fun-loving environment (Groysberg et al., 2018). Learning cultures value innovation, creativity, and exploration, in contrast to authority cultures that focus on control (Groysberg et al., 2018). Safety cultures value planning and preparedness, and order cultures focus on respect and shared norms (Groysberg et al., 2018). Finally, results cultures focus on goal achievement (Groysberg et al., 2018). Cmelikova (2017) summarizes scholars' widely accepted cultural styles including clan, adhocracy, hierarchy, and market, which all have some similarity to one or more of Groysberg et al.'s (2018) styles. The clan style focuses on supporting collaboration by valuing commitment, communication, and individual growth (Cmelikova, 2017). This style is similar to Groysberg et al.'s caring culture style, and therefore aligns with associations that seek to build a sense of community and belongingness. The adhocracy culture values innovation, agility, and creativity, while the hierarchy culture focuses on control and values uniformity, efficiency, and consistency (Cmelikova, 2017). The final market style focuses on competition and therefore values aggression in the marketplace, profitability, and goal attainment (Cmelikova, 2017).

In order to shape and support a desired cultural style, leaders must understand the organization's present culture and make culture a leadership priority (Warrick, 2017). Leaders then must identify core values and communicate those values to all stakeholders of the organization (Warrick, 2017). Effective and frequent communication has the positive benefit of building trusting relationships, which some cultural styles value (Linklater Lawyers, 2019). Leaders also must model the desired behaviors that they expect in the organization and recruit employees who will practice the desired behaviors (Warrick, 2017). In addition, leaders must align organizational strategy with culture so that strategy decisions support the strengthening of the desired culture. The use of symbols, ceremonies, socialization, and stories also support a desired cultural style (Warrick, 2017). Symbols include actions, objects, or events that communicate meaning, and ceremonies include activities that hold meaning for stakeholders

(Warrick, 2017). Associations are uniquely positioned to use symbols and ceremonies because events play a core role in delivering benefits to members. Socialization includes socializing individuals into a culture by providing opportunities for individuals to socialize and bond (Warrick, 2017). Socialization is at the core of associations because of their focus on networking and building relationships (Huang & Chen, 2016; Lagaras, 2016). Stories include narratives that reinforce the core values of an organizational culture (Warrick, 2017). Storytelling serves a large role in associations because members' stories tend to motivate people to increase engagement (Gammel, 2011; Jacobs, 2014). Finally, leaders must actively monitor and manage a culture by assessing the culture at least yearly (Warrick, 2017). In the context of associations, leaders can accomplish this with annual member feedback surveys.

Effectively Communicate.

Clear and effective communication is an essential way for leaders to engage association members (Jones, 2016; Abel & Howard, 2017; Martin & Waxman, 2017). The principles of effective communication include clarity, brevity, limited content, accuracy, and design (Hunjet et al., 2017). Research shows that effective communication from leaders secures member participation (Jones, 2016; Lagaras, 2016) and builds member commitment (Lagaras, 2016). Effective communication also engages volunteers (Kang, 2016; Nesbit, 2018; Bauer & Lim, 2019; Milbourn et al., 2019) and assists in retaining and engaging donors (Gazley & Dignam, 2010; Naskrent & Siebelt, 2011; Aldihari, 2018). As association leaders develop communication strategies, they need awareness of the numerous trends that impact member communications (Jones, 2016). A few of the major trends include the fact that current members have more expectations of communication than in the past, communication expectations and preferences differ among the numerous generations, members struggle with the volume of incoming information, development of relevant and customized content is essential, and association members operate in an environment that has many different access points for information and content (Jones, 2016). Dalton and Dignam's (2007) study of over 16,000 association members illustrates the differences in communication preferences because the results show that members want to receive information by various means including magazines, conferences, meetings, e-newsletters, web sites, Internet, networks, blogs, and more.

A communication best practice among associations includes having a robust orientation and engagement strategy for new members (Jacobs, 2014). By taking this approach, leaders encourage members to become immediately involved in the association (Dalton & Dignam, 2007; Fabbri, 2019). Coe (2014) advocates having a strong focus on new members because they compose the most vulnerable group for nonrenewals and therefore they need the most relationship building attention. Jacobs (2014) suggests that leaders use a variety of orientation approaches because of the changing needs of members and technology advances. Associations can offer a formal in-person or webinar orientation event, provide a written orientation guide, and offer online videos (Jacobs, 2014). Video options include member testimonials, a welcome video, education/training videos, and a formal orientation video (Kaiser, 2018). Beyond the initial orientation offerings (orientation guide and in-person event), Kaiser's (2018) mixed-methods study of new member engagement plans at 13 associations finds that other effective communication tactics for new member engagement include emails, phone calls, online communities, letters, and social media. With regards to engagement effectiveness, Kaiser (2018) declares emails, phone calls, and in-person events as the most effective.

A second communication best practice is to segment and customize communications. Segmenting and customizing communications involves providing customized information to different segments of members based on interests and behaviors (Jacobs, 2014; Myers, 2016; Fabbri, 2019). Generic messaging will eventually become untenable because those messages will get lost within the volume of communications (Association of Chambers of Commerce Executives, 2015). In addition, Soker (2016) argues that generic messages cannot engage all member segments because of their superficial nature. Members need solutions to the specific problems in their segment, and therefore, leaders must customize meaningful communication to the different member segments (Soker, 2016). Technology solutions, such as a customer relationship management systems (CRM), enable associations to both break their members into different segments and then successfully communicate customized messages to them (Soker, 2016).

A third communication best practice is to communicate with members across many different channels. The most utilized channels in associations include public social media networks, websites, private online communities, and email/e-newsletters (Jacobs, 2014). In the context of engagement, Gammel (2011) concludes that social media serves a profound role in attracting and sustaining engagement with prospects, current members, volunteers, and donors. Popular social media sites used by associations include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, and Pinterest (Martin, 2016). For no or little cost, these sites enable associations to share information, connect with others, and cultivate donor, member, and volunteer relationships (Hight, 2011). Wang and Ki (2018) advocate that social media serves as an excellent tool to promote membership benefits and associational support to members and also prospects. Lucas' (2016) and Stoffel's (2015) article summaries of social media strategies for two national associations both encourage associations to use social media given their associations' success with increasing involvement and engagement via social media use. Sabato's (2017) quantitative study of the implementation of targeted social media strategies in a professional pharmacy association finds that social media strategies increase the association's ability to engage members in real time and with widespread reach. However, Rosencrans' (2017) qualitative study of two nonprofits finds that social media certainly has its challenges. While Rosencrans (2017) finds that social media enabled two nonprofits to support and strengthen existing relationships, the nonprofit organizations lacked the capacity to keep up with the frequency and interactivity expected on the social media platforms.

In addition to social media, websites serve as a primary communication tool for associations (Martin, 2016). If properly designed and implemented, a website provides limitless engagement opportunities for members (Gammel, 2011). Websites provide members-only and potentially public access to publications, email lists, discussion boards, newsgroups, podcasts, online training opportunities, online directories, e-commerce opportunities, online registration for events, and webinars (Martin, 2016). Gammel (2011) stresses that an effective website's homepage must provide "next step" actions that support engagement. Best practices to accomplish this goal include using a visual promotional box, listing upcoming meetings and events, and offering recent association news articles (Gammel, 2011).

Beyond the use of website and social media, the literature also discusses the value of providing private online communities for association members and communicating with members via email. According to Martin (2016), private online communities are growing in the association world because of the higher ROI associated with their use. Private online communities provide the benefits of one location for members to share tips and resources, a secure site for member questions and answers, members-only access to valuable content, and access from anywhere at any time (Avenue M Group, 2014). In comparison to public social media sites, private online communities enable associations to deepen engagement beyond likes and favorites, increase the likelihood that recipients will view messages, determine community rules and privacy, and monetize the communities (Martin, 2016). Finally, email/e-newsletters are also effective communication tools for association leaders (Jacobs, 2014). Emails are very economical and the use of email programs such as Constant Contact allow associations to review recipients' behaviors via open and clickthrough rates (Martin, 2016).

Summary of the Literature Review

This literature review provides a basis for understanding chambers of commerce, general member engagement motivations in associations, and the four specific member engagement dimensions (organizational commitment, giving of money, giving of time/volunteerism, and internal and external participation). The review also summarizes engagement challenges in associations, which include broad societal changes, rapidly changing member needs and expectations, significant competition, generational challenges, and insufficient resources. In addition, the researcher discussed the positive correlation between member engagement and retention along with the critical role of leadership in nonprofits and associations. The literature review concludes with a detailed discussion of the six components of the member engagement leadership model and accompanying best practices.

Summary of Section 1 and Transition

This section discusses the foundational details of the study and why the study benefits leadership in the field of business. The researcher presents background information, which helps the reader to understand the context of the study, and this is followed by the problem and purpose statements of the study. Next, the researcher discusses the nature of the study, which includes details on the chosen research method and design. The nature of the study describes why the researcher did not choose the other options for methods and designs. The section also lists the research questions and provides a detailed discussion of the conceptual framework/leadership model developed by the researcher in the study. Then, the researcher discusses the significance of the study, which includes details on how the concepts of the study relate to Biblical principles and how the study relates to the field of leadership in business. The researcher defines all key terms for the reader and also discusses the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study. Finally, the researcher presents a literature review that covers the numerous concepts in the study. Those concepts include general member engagement motivations in associations, the four specific member engagement dimensions, member engagement challenges, the positive correlation between member engagement and retention, and a discussion of the six components of the member engagement leadership model and accompanying best practices.

The next section restates the purpose statement, describes the role of the researcher in the study, defines the participants, and discusses the key components of working with the participants. The next section also revisits a general discussion of the research method and design, after which the researcher provides details on the population and sampling method, process for data collection, and data analysis. Finally, the section addresses reliability and validity of the research findings.

Section 2: The Project

Given numerous trends, nonprofit association leaders find attracting, engaging, and retaining members very challenging (Sladek, 2011). Prioritizing member engagement is of particular importance because engaged members serve as an organizational strength given their propensity to renew membership (Henczel, 2016). Very little scholarly research has studied leadership and its impact on member engagement in nonprofit associations, and no scholarly research exists that focuses on this specific topic in chambers of commerce. Therefore, this study will fill gaps in the literature that pertain to effective leadership practices that positively impact member engagement and ultimately retention in chambers of commerce.

This section summarizes numerous details regarding completion of this study. First, this section reiterates the study's purpose statement, and summarizes the researcher's role and the research methodology. Second, the section defines the study's participants, and discusses the population and sample, including the sampling techniques. Third, the section includes a discussion of the study's data collection and organization techniques. Finally, the section summarizes the researcher's data analysis approach and reviews the reliability and validity techniques that the researcher used to ensure quality of the study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case research study is to add to the scholarly body of knowledge by discovering effective strategies to engage chamber of commerce members, developing a leadership model for member engagement, and identifying best practices that chamber of commerce leaders should use to engage members. The specific demographic for this study includes leaders of chambers of commerce in Northeast Ohio. This study seeks to highlight the importance of member engagement in chambers of commerce and provide leaders with a leadership model and list of best practices that will assist them in strengthening their approach for supporting and increasing member engagement.

The literature recognizes the particular challenge of leading nonprofit organizations (Freeborough, 2020). The literature also broadly recognizes that leadership serves as a critical factor of success in nonprofit organizations (Palumbo, 2016). In addition, scholars repeatedly state that a leadership deficit exists in the sector (Palumbo, 2016). Specifically within nonprofit associations, scholars posit that successful leadership differs from leadership in business, government, and other nonprofit organizations (Nesbit et al., 2016). Therefore, this study will assist in providing insight into effective leadership approaches in nonprofit associations that support member engagement and thus benefit the organizations.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher performed three major roles in completing this study, which included selecting the two case study sites and identifying study participants from those sites, gathering data, and analyzing the data. Following the decision to use a multiple case study approach to study a research problem, a researcher must select the "most promising and useful" cases (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 100). In this study, the researcher worked with a knowledgeable intermediary who provided the researcher with a list of Northeast Ohio chambers of commerce that most likely fit the desired chamber of commerce profile (member count, location, paid staff, and retention rate). Upon receipt of the list from the intermediary, the researcher contacted the executive directors of the numerous chambers, confirmed which chambers of commerce met the study requirements, and presented two chamber of commerce executive directors with the opportunity to participate in the study. The researcher then worked closely with the executive directors to identify participants (board members and engaged members) from each chamber of commerce who the researcher would ask to participate in interviews. This step also included the researcher receiving signed approval to conduct research at each case study location and agreeing to ethically protect the research participants.

Following the selection of cases and participants, the researcher serves as the main research instrument (Clark & Veale, 2018) and collects extensive data from multiple sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher used four of Yin's (2018) six suggested sources of evidence/data for case studies: documentation, archival records, interviews, and direct observations. The researcher worked with the chambers' executive directors to secure access to archival records and documentation that pertained to member engagement. The chambers' executive directors also suggested which chamber of commerce events and meetings that the researcher should attend and observe. In addition, the researcher developed questions for the study's numerous interviews, which the researcher listed in the study's two Interview Guides (Appendices B & C). The researcher kept a detailed record of the participants' responses to the interview questions for analysis, which included recording and transcribing interviews into a written format following the interviews.

After the collection of data from multiple resources, the researcher then analyses the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and in qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary source of data analysis (Clark & Veale, 2018). According to Stake (2010), qualitative researchers will use their own past experiences to interpret the data collected in a study. This fact results in the possibility that researcher bias may influence the study's results (Clark & Veale, 2018). In this study, the researcher used the triangulation method when analyzing data in order to minimize any personal bias. The researcher also used bracketing, which is designed to reduce the adverse effects of preconceptions and presuppositions that can negatively impact research results (Shufutinsky, 2020). The researcher chose to use the memo method of bracketing throughout data analysis, which was a way for the researcher to examine and reflect upon her engagement with the data (Tufford & Newman, 2010). This process enabled the researcher to develop insights such as the highlighting of her preconceptions (Tufford & Newman, 2010). The researcher identified key themes in the four sources of data that related to the study's research questions and determined if the themes applied to the study's concepts and theories. Finally, the researcher presented the findings of the study.

The researcher's role in this study included selecting the two case study sites and identifying study participants from those sites, gathering data, and analyzing the data. An intermediary assisted the researcher with selecting sites and the executive directors at the two study sites then assisted the researcher with identifying study participants. The researcher was the main research instrument in the study and utilized four sources of evidence during data collection. The researcher then analyzed the data using both bracketing and triangulation to ensure the quality of the findings.

Research Methodology

A study's research questions drive the researcher's choice of research method and design (Queiros et al., 2017). This study is conducted with a qualitative flexible design using a multiple case study method. The general objective of a qualitative design is to produce in-depth and illustrative information that assists in understanding and solving a stated problem (Queiros et al., 2017). The specific objectives of this study are to develop an in-depth understanding of effective strategies used by leaders to support member engagement in chambers of commerce, to develop a leadership model for member engagement, and to identify best practices for member engagement. Qualitative research methods enable a researcher to compile data from individuals that enlightens a research problem (Stake, 2010). The problem the researcher addressed in this study is the failure of chamber of commerce leaders to effectively engage members. The researcher chose a multiple case study design because the design is highly effective when a researcher is exploring a phenomenon in depth within the phenomenon's true context to achieve a deep understanding from those who experience the phenomenon (Yin, 2018). The following sections discuss in more detail why the researcher chose a qualitative flexible design using a case study method.

Discussion of Flexible Design

This study uses a qualitative methodology because qualitative research methods effectively enable a researcher to develop a complex and detailed understanding of an issue (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The issue the researcher addressed in this study is the lack of member engagement in chambers of commerce, and by talking directly with chamber of commerce leaders, the researcher could effectively understand how the leaders actively work to address the issue (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, by speaking directly with engaged chamber of commerce members, the researcher could understand and further explain the dynamics behind their active engagement and uncover the leader strategies that best support engagement. Qualitative research is highly effective in explaining the dynamics of social relations and describing relationships, processes, and phenomena that do not have defined variables (Queiros et al., 2017).

The researcher did not choose the quantitative research method for this study because this method best examines the cause-and-effect relationship between numerous variables, which this study does not include (Park & Park, 2016). Quantitative research also enables a researcher to verify a hypothesis, which was not the purpose of this study (Basias & Pollalis, 2018). Because the use of quantitative measures did not fit the purpose of this study, the researcher also chose not to use a mixed-method approach, as this design uses both quantitative and qualitative designs (Creswell, 2014).

Discussion of Multiple Case Study

As previously stated, in large part the study's research questions drive the choice of research design (Queiros et al., 2017). The preferred research design for studies that ask "how" and "why" questions is a case study because these questions are more explanatory (Yin, 2018). Two of this study's four research questions are "how" questions. Case studies are also a preferred research design when the researcher studies contemporary events and analyses a variety of evidence including documents, artifacts, interviews, and direct observations (Yin, 2018). In this study, the researcher examines the current state of member engagement in two chambers of commerce and relies upon documents, artifacts, interviews, and direct observations to fully understand the phenomenon of member engagement.

A case study investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context and uses multiple types of evidence (Ragab & Arisha, 2017). The case study design emerged from sociology and has been very valuable in practice-oriented fields such as education, medicine, and management (Mohajan, 2018). The use of a case or multiple case study design enables a researcher to describe how each case illustrates an issue or problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Yin (2018), multiple case studies provide more robust results because of more compelling evidence. Yin (2018) also advocates that if the researcher has the resources and a choice, the researcher should use a multiple case design because of the significance of the analytic benefits and conclusions of at least two cases. In addition, using a multiple case study design allows a researcher to analyze themes within and between the study's cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Finally, the basic motive of a multiple case study is to collect numerous types of data from multiple sources; this approach then enables the researcher to utilize triangulation (Yin, 2018). Triangulation is the use of multiple sources in research, which increases validity, decreases bias, and provides numerous perspectives on a phenomenon (Renz et al., 2018). Therefore, in order to strengthen the findings of this study, the researcher uses a multiple case study design. The researcher carefully selected each case so that they predicted similar results (i.e., literal replication). When choosing the sufficient number of cases to include in a study, a researcher should use discretionary judgment rather than a formulaic approach (Yin, 2018). Yin suggests that two or three literal replications may be sufficient when the theory of a study is straightforward, and the issue under study does not require an immense amount of certainty (Yin, 2018). Using a multiple case study approach enabled the researcher to complete an in-depth description and analysis of leader challenges with member engagement and leader strategies that effectively impact member engagement in two separate chambers of commerce.

The researcher chose not to use narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnographic research designs because they did not best fit the purpose of the research. A narrative research design focuses on the lived and told experiences of one or two individuals and this research required in-depth interviews of numerous chamber of commerce leaders to effectively develop a leadership model and best practices guide (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A phenomenological research design, which aims to distill the experiences of individuals with a phenomenon into a specific description, could have been used in this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018); however, the researcher preferred to use the multiple case study approach which enabled the development of an in-depth understanding of member engagement in a few select chambers of commerce. The grounded theory research design enables a researcher to create or discover a theory, which was not the purpose of this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Finally, an ethnographic research design involves a researcher being immersed in the daily lives of a culture-sharing group, which was not the case in this study, as chamber of commerce leaders do not participate in a culture-sharing group (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Summary of Research Methodology

The study's research questions and purpose drove the researcher's choice of method and design. Quantitative research examines the cause-and-effect relationships between numerous variables (Park & Park, 2016) and involves verifying a hypothesis using questionnaires with closed-ended questions (Basias & Pollalis, 2018). The researcher could not answer the research questions with closed-ended questions in this study; therefore, the study uses a qualitative method approach. The researcher chose the multiple case study design from the five potential qualitative methods because the design allowed the researcher to develop an in-depth description and analysis of challenges with member engagement, the most effective strategies for member engagement used by leaders, and the impact of those strategies on member retention.

Participants

Yin (2018) suggests taking a one-phased approach to selecting cases when a researcher has less than a dozen potential candidates, which was the situation with this multiple case study. The researcher streamlined the screening procedure, as Yin (2018) stresses that researchers should avoid an extensive screening process. An intermediary, who has extensive knowledge of the chamber of commerce community in Northeast Ohio, introduced the researcher to numerous executive directors at local chambers of commerce who were most likely to meet the study's criteria. The researcher then reached out to all of the executive directors via email to introduce the study and the criteria for inclusion. Following the introductory email, the researcher contacted all executive directors by phone in order to begin building a rapport and to determine each individual's interest in participating. A few executive directors declined to participate in the study and a few others explained that their chambers did not meet the study's required criteria of an above average retention rate. After contacting all of the suggested executive directors and reviewing study criteria with them, the researcher identified two executive directors who agreed to have their chambers of commerce serve as the cases for the study. During the phone conversations with each executive director, the researcher summarized the details of the study and answered numerous questions posed by each executive director.

After the executive directors agreed to participate in the study, they assisted the researcher with identifying appropriate individuals for the study's interviews. Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasize that selected interviewees include those who can provide valuable information that pertains to the study's research questions. The interviewees included the chambers' executive directors, board members, staff members, and engaged chamber of commerce members. The criteria used to select all interviewees pertained to either their role as a leader in the chamber of commerce or their level of engagement in the chamber. The role of a leader in this study includes those with both positional power and also those who directly develop and implement engagement strategies, such as staff members. The researcher discusses additional details on selection later in this section. Once the researcher developed a list of interviewees for each chamber of commerce, both executive directors emailed the potential interviewees to notify them that the researcher would contact them regarding participation in the study. The researcher then sent each participant an introductory email and, in some cases, followed up with a telephone call to discuss their potential interest in participating.

Yin (2018) stresses the importance of protecting human subjects in qualitative research. Five ways to protect study participants include gaining informed consent, avoiding the use of deception, protecting participants' privacy and confidentiality, taking special measures to protect any vulnerable groups, and choosing participants in an equitable manner (Yin, 2018). The protections for study participants that pertained to this study included gaining informed consent, avoiding the use of deception, and protecting participants' privacy and confidentiality. The researcher gave each participant a participant consent form prior to the interview, which described the case study, risks and benefits of participating, and enabled them to participate should they choose. Liberty University's IRB provided templates for the participant consent forms, which the researcher then customized for this multiple case study. The use of the participant consent forms ensured that there was no deception as the researcher fully disclosed the details of the study and all expectations for participants prior to their inclusion (Rashid, et al., 2019). The researcher notified the participants that the researcher would protect and store all their personal information and any provided data in a confidential manner, thus ensuring them both privacy and confidentiality (Bolderston, 2012). The researcher removed all identifying information for participants in all case study documentation and records. Due to COVID-19, the recorded interviews took place using Webex. Confidentiality is challenging to ensure with online interviews, due to potential access by systems' administrators (Bolderston, 2012). As a result, immediately following all interviews, the researcher downloaded the Webex files to a secure hard drive and deleted the recordings initially housed on the Webex server. The effective and consistent use of the above three methods ensured the ethical protection of all participants.

Population and Sampling

A study's population represents the entire group of organizations and/or individuals that share common attributes regarding the topic being studied (Ragab & Arisha, 2017). The general population of this study includes chamber of commerce organizations in the United States that meet the specific study criteria discussed in the below section. Chambers of commerce in Northeast Ohio serve as a subset of this study's general population. Northeast Ohio includes 16 individual counties and approximately 50 chambers of commerce operate in those counties. The researcher does not know how many of those 50 chambers of commerce meet the study's specific criteria, as research does not exist that addresses this topic. In the specific context of data collection, populations include individuals who possess the information that the researcher must obtain in order to answer the research questions (Ragab & Arisha, 2017). The population for data collection of this study includes chamber of commerce leaders and engaged members in the two chamber of commerce case study sites. The researcher estimates that both chambers of commerce have over 40 chamber leaders and 200 engaged members. The researcher used both purposive and quota sampling to determine the leaders and engaged members who participated in the study.

Discussion of Population

As previously discussed, the researcher worked with an intermediary to identify numerous chambers of commerce who fit the organizational criteria for the study. The criteria required that chosen case sites possess a suburban location, a total membership of less than 750 members, paid staff members, and a member retention rate greater than the national average of 86%. After the researcher spoke with numerous recommended chamber of commerce executives, she chose to study two chambers that were willing to participate and that fulfilled each of these criteria. In selecting the case study sites, the researcher utilized replication logic rather than sampling logic as advised by Yin (2018).

Once the researcher secured the sites, the researcher needed to determine participants and gain access to them (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The population for the study included all chamber leaders who had experience developing and implementing strategies designed to encourage and support member engagement. The population also included highly engaged and committed members who donated time and money and who also actively participated in the chambers of commerce.

Discussion of Sampling

A sample is a list of individuals from the population chosen by a researcher to participate in a study (Ragab & Arisha, 2017). Therefore, the sample in this study comprises selected leaders of the two chambers of commerce case study sites, including executive directors, board members, committee chairs, and staff members who have experience with developing and implementing member engagement strategies. The sample also includes selected chamber of commerce members that serve as committed donors, volunteers, and chamber participants.

In qualitative research, researchers determine samples by using sampling techniques (Rosenthal, 2016). Potential sampling techniques include two main classifications, probability and non-probability (Saunders et al., 2009). In probability sampling, every individual in a population has an equal probability of being randomly chosen as part of a sample (Ragab & Arisha, 2017). In contrast, with non-probability sampling the researcher determines the sampling techniques rather than leaving that selection to random chance (Ragab & Arisha, 2017). Qualitative studies largely rely on non-probability sampling (Rosenthal, 2016). Five major non-probability sampling techniques that researchers frequently utilize in qualitative studies include quota, purposive, snowball, self-selection, and convenience (haphazard) (Saunders et al., 2009). Quota sampling uses stratified sampling and chooses individuals from different groups using a set quota for each specific group (Saunders et al., 2009). Purposive sampling involves a researcher using judgment to choose individuals with the best ability to help the researcher achieve the research objectives (Saunders et al., 2009). Snowball sampling includes contacting various individuals and asking them to recommend individuals for the study (Saunders et al., 2009). Self-selection sampling allows individuals to express their interest in participating in the research and convenience/haphazard involves choosing accessible individuals at random for inclusion in the study (Saunders et al., 2009).

The researcher used both purposive and quota sampling techniques when choosing the participants in this study. The researcher used purposive sampling because this approach ensures that those who participate in the study have experience with the phenomenon being studied (Rosenthal, 2016). In this study, the researcher strove to develop a deep understanding of leaders' and members' extensive experience with engagement. Chosen chamber of commerce leaders all had direct experience with developing and/or implementing engagement strategies. This was critical because their direct experience with engagement strategies enabled them to have knowledge regarding the challenges of engagement, the most successful engagement strategies, and those strategies' potential impact on member retention. With regards to members that the research chose as study participants, chamber leaders considered them all highly engaged; they were committed donors, volunteers, and active participants in chamber events. The researcher used quota sampling because the researcher sought to understand the perspectives of different types of engaged chamber of commerce members. Therefore, the researcher set quotas for gender, length of membership in the chamber (both short and long term), and age (three generations). Both chambers of commerce use ChamberMaster, a customized customer relationship management (CRM) program for chambers of commerce. Using reports from ChamberMaster that summarize engaged members, the researcher worked with each chamber of commerce's executive director to select study participants using the purposive and quota sampling techniques. The executive directors also assisted the researcher with identifying board members, committee chairs, and staff members who had experience with developing and implementing engagement strategies for inclusion in the sample.

Sample size is a critical consideration in qualitative studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, firm rules for setting a sample size in qualitative studies do not exist (Marshall et al., 2013). Creswell (2016) states that an appropriate sample size depends on the study design, the level of issue complexity, available resources, and the amount of research data. Setting a sample size for in-depth interviews requires a researcher to strike a balance between the need to achieve a rich experiential description of the phenomenon from participants without sacrificing the experiences of the entire population of potential participants (Rosenthal, 2016). Researchers best achieve balance by using the saturation principle, which means that a researcher suspends data collection when no new information is introduced during the interviews (Rosenthal, 2016). Saunders et al. (2018) refers to saturation as informational redundancy, which once reached signals the end of data collection and the beginning of data analysis. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), saturation generally may involve 20 to 60 interviews depending on the design of the study. Marshall et al. (2013) states that multiple case studies should include at least 15 to 20 interviews. This study included interviews with 11 leaders and engaged members from Chamber

A and 10 leaders and engaged member from Chamber B. The researcher discontinued interviews when saturation was achieved.

Summary of Population and Sampling

The researcher used replication logic to select the two case study sites from the population of all chambers of commerce in Northeast Ohio that met the specific selection criteria. The data collection population included all chamber leaders and engaged members at both chambers of commerce. Using both purposive and quota sampling, the researcher selected and interviewed 21 individuals for the study, a number consistent with expert recommendations (Marshall et al., 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018). In order to ensure that the sample size was appropriate, the researcher utilized the saturation principle.

Data Collection and Organization

Data collection is the systematic process of collecting data from numerous sources (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) state that the hallmark of a strong qualitative case study is that the approach provides an in-depth understanding of the case, which researchers accomplish by collecting and integrating numerous types of available qualitative data. In addition, Creswell and Poth (2018) visualize data collection as a set of interrelated activities that include locating a site(s)/individual(s), gaining access and developing rapport with participants, sampling, collecting data, recording data, minimizing field issues, and storing data securely. Previous sections discussed locating the case study sites, gaining access, building rapport, and sampling. Therefore, this section specifically discusses the data collection plan, the instruments used for data collection, and the data organization plan (including data storage).

Data Collection Plan

Yin (2018) summarizes six types of evidence commonly included in case study research: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. This study includes the use of documentation, archival records, interviews, and direct observation. The researcher did not use participant observation because this type of evidence requires that the researcher participate in the actions being studied (Yin, 2018). The researcher only observed board meetings, committee meetings, and member meetings rather than actively participating. In addition, the researcher did not use physical artifacts, which include items such as technological devices, artwork, tools or instruments, or other physical evidence, because they did not apply to this research (Yin, 2018). The use of various sources of evidence in case studies is critical, as the motive of completing a case study is to develop an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon in its real-world context and multiple sources of evidence deepens that understanding (Yin, 2018). In addition, the use of multiple sources of evidence provides the researcher corroborating evidence, which deepens the understanding of a theme or perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Researchers refer to this corroboration of evidence as triangulation, which helps to strengthen the validity of case study research (Yin, 2018). The below paragraphs summarize the four types of evidence used in this study.

Documentation.

Case studies ought to include documentation because documentation serves the important role of corroborating and augmenting evidence from other sources used in the study (Yin, 2018). Documentation may include agendas, announcements, and meeting minutes; administration documents such as internal reports; and news articles pertaining to the organization (Yin, 2018). After receiving signed permission to collect documentation, both chambers of commerce provided the researcher with copies of meeting minutes, agendas, and internal reports that pertained to member engagement and retention. For example, the meeting minutes for the membership committee at Chamber B served as an excellent source of documentation that repeatedly discussed member engagement efforts. The researcher also completed an online search for news and magazine articles on both chambers of commerce.

Archival Records.

The usefulness of archival records will vary in case studies; archival records could serve as the object of extensive analysis in some case studies, and, in others, archival records may hold minor relevance (Yin, 2018). Archival records include federal, state, and local files; organizational service records; organizational records such as budgets; geographical maps and charts; and survey data completed by those outside of the organization (Yin, 2018). The researcher completed an extensive review of the chambers' websites and social media accounts (LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram) in search of information on member engagement efforts. The websites and social media accounts provided extensive information on member benefits, chamber programs, and the organizations' missions and goals. The chambers of commerce also provided access to organizational records that included completed member survey reports, strategic plans, and strategic plan update reports. In addition, the chambers of commerce provided service records, which showed member retention rates from year to year. The organizational records provided the researcher with significant information that pertained to member engagement and retention.

Interviews.

In-depth semi-structured interviews comprise the main source of evidence in this study. After the researcher discussed potential interviewees with each chamber of commerce's executive director, the researcher contacted the interviewees by email, and in some cases, by phone, to confirm their willingness to participate and to schedule a mutually agreeable time for the interviews. The researcher listed the interview questions for each type of interview (chamber leader and engaged member) in the interview guides (Appendices B & C). Due to COVID-19, all interviews did not take place face-to-face, but rather using the online virtual platform, Webex. Prior to the interview, the researcher received signed consent statements from all interviewees via email. In addition, the researcher provided the interview questions to the participants prior to the interview, which assisted the researcher in preparing the interviewee and lessened the interview time. The average interview time was 30 minutes. The researcher also received approval from all interviewees to record the interviews. The researcher used Webex to record the interviews in addition to an iPhone speech-to-text app. Immediately following each interview, the researcher transcribed the recordings into a written document and then erased the recording housed on the Webex server and the iPhone app. The researcher also provided the interviewees with the opportunity to review the final transcripts of their interviews; scholars refer to this process as member checking, which is a best practice for establishing a study's validity (Bolderston, 2012). The researcher also completed a few follow-up interviews via email with the goal of addressing additional questions that arose during data analysis.

Direct Observation.

Yin (2018) advocates that direct observation can provide additional information on a study's topic. Direct observation could include observing meetings, classrooms, and work activities etc. (Yin, 2018). Direct observation may provide the researcher with additional insight as the process enables the researcher to observe participants in a natural environment (Morgan et al., 2017). The researcher worked with each chamber of commerce's executive director who suggested valuable meetings and events to attend. Based on their recommendations, the researcher attended board meetings, committee meetings, and general membership meetings over a four-week period. The researcher took notes during the meetings that summarized both the content and the behaviors and interactions of chamber leaders. Note that, due to COVID-19, the majority of the meetings took place virtually using the online virtual meeting platforms Zoom and/or Webex. The researcher also made direct observations while completing interviews and while visiting the chambers of commerce to collect other forms of evidence.

Instruments

As previously discussed, this study includes two main instruments, the researcher and interviews. Stake (2010) states that the researcher oftentimes serves as the main research instrument in qualitative research studies. In case study research, Yin (2018) argues that a researcher must have training and experience in order to effectively address the interaction between the study's issues and data collection. Researchers ought to ask appropriate questions and fairly interpret the answers, actively listen, remain adaptive, firmly understand the issues being studied, and adhere to ethical standards (Yin, 2018). With regards to interpretation, qualitative research is heavily based on the interpretation of researchers (Stake, 2010). A researcher must continuously define and redefine the meanings of what they see during observations and what they hear during interviews (Stake, 2010). Therefore, the researcher served as an instrument in this study by fairly, ethically, and carefully interpreting what she observed and heard during both direct observations and interviews. The researcher also actively listened during the interviews and actively participated by asking clarifying and probing questions. The researcher remained calm and adaptive throughout the study, such as when she encountered technical difficulties during the online interviews. In addition, the researcher had a strong grasp of the concept of member engagement given her completion of an extensive literature review and her twenty-five years of work with chambers of commerce. However, in order to minimize bias in the study, given her experience with the topic, the researcher used the memoing method of bracketing. Finally, the researcher took the utmost care to conduct research ethically.

Interviews served as the second main instrument in this study. Interviews serve as one of the most important sources of case study evidence because they provide explanations to key events and provide insights regarding participants' perspectives (Yin, 2018). According to Stake (2010), interviews serve the purposes of securing unique information and phenomenon interpretations from interviewees, generating aggregate data from numerous individuals, and providing information on phenomenon that the researcher cannot observe. Participants in this study's interviews included the two chamber of commerce executive directors, board members, committee chairs, staff members, and engaged members. The researcher developed two interview guides, the first for chamber leaders (executive directors, board members, committee chairs, and staff members), and the second for engaged members. The interview guides include an introductory statement, main interview questions, and a closing statement (See Appendices B & C). The researcher used in-depth semi-structured interviews that primarily consisted of open-ended questions. Most qualitative research uses semi-structured interviews (Gephart & Saylors, 2020). Semi-structured interviews have a set of pre-determined questions like structured interviews, but they allow for the flexibility of asking additional questions, which allows new ideas to emerge during the interview (Ragab & Arisha, 2017). Additional questions may include probing and clarifying questions, which help the researcher to refine the information and interpretation (Stake, 2010). The researcher also developed a member engagement best practices checklist (Appendix A), which she used during each interview. The researcher determined which best practices to include on the checklist by reviewing her extensive literature review. As interviewees mentioned best practices listed on the checklist, the researcher marked them on the checklist. This enabled the researcher to draw comparisons between the two case study sites during the analysis phase.

The researcher designed the open-ended interview questions included in the interview guides to align with the four research questions, so that participants could share their insights and perspectives on each research question. The researcher asked both opinion questions and behavior questions. Opinion questions aim to understand what individuals think, and behavior questions aim to understand what individuals do (Ragab & Arisha, 2018). The researcher asked chamber leaders questions that pertained to their challenges with securing member engagement in each of the four engagement dimensions (commitment, donations, volunteers, and participation). The researcher also asked chamber leaders questions designed to uncover strategies that they use to encourage and support each of the four engagement dimensions, in addition to questions that sought to capture how those strategies impact member retention. Finally, the researcher asked chamber leaders questions regarding which strategies chamber leaders considered best practices for supporting each of the four engagement dimensions and what leadership skills they used to support each of the four engagement dimensions. The researcher asked engaged members questions that sought to understand the challenges that negatively impacted their commitment, volunteering, donations, and participation in the chamber. In addition, the researcher asked engaged members questions about strategies that chamber of commerce leaders use to encourage their commitment, donations, volunteering, and participation and the impact of those strategies on their decision to renew membership annually. Finally, the researcher asked engaged members questions that sought to discover which leader strategies and skills most effectively supported their commitment, volunteering, donations, and participation in the chamber.

The researcher also asked attribute questions of both the chamber of commerce leaders and engaged members, which helped provide context to the interviewee's perspectives, as context is essential to qualitative data interpretation (Stake, 2010). Attribute questions define an individual's characteristics, such as demographic data (Ragab & Arisha, 2018). The researcher ended the questions with a final broad-based question that asked, "is there anything that we have missed that you think is important to discuss regarding member engagement?" Ending an interview with this type of final question can reveal additional important information (Bolderston, 2012). In developing all the questions, the researcher followed the best practices of using truly open-ended, neutral, singular, and clear questions (Rosenthal, 2016). A best practice in interviewing also includes placing the questions in a coherent order on the interview guide (Rosenthal, 2016). The researcher arranged the question order so that all questions that addressed each specific dimension of engagement (commitment, giving of money, volunteering, and participation) were included together. Finally, numerous research professionals reviewed the interview guides to ensure that the questions adhered to best practices.

Data Organization Plan

Yin (2018) advocates that researchers create a case study database, which compiles all of the data from the case study. The data included in the database represents all sources of evidence that the researcher collects throughout the research and allows for easy retrieval (Yin, 2018). In addition, a well-organized database assists the researcher with analysis (Yin, 2018). Four components of the case study database include notes, documents, tabular materials, and narrative compilations (Yin, 2018). The researcher included three of the four recommended components in the case study's database and created digital folders for each component on a personal computer.

The most common component of the database includes case study notes (Yin, 2018). The researcher used extensive handwritten, audio, and Microsoft Word transcribed case notes. In addition, as previously mentioned, the researcher received permission to record all interviews. After the researcher transcribed the interviews into Word files, the researcher stored them in the database. Creswell and Poth (2018) state that researchers must mask participant names to avoid any identifiable information in research files. Therefore, in order to maintain confidentiality for participants, the researcher erased any identifying content on the interview transcripts and created keys that linked the interviewees' names to unique numbers affiliated with the data. Once the researcher completed data collection, she then deleted all identifiers. The case study notes folder in the database also included field notes from direct observations, and document analysis notes.

The database's document folder included all of the collected documents on the case study, including meeting minutes, agendas, completed member survey reports, strategic plans, strategic plan update reports, service records, and internal reports that pertained to member engagement and retention. In addition, the researcher included all newspaper and magazine documents in this folder. Based on Yin's (2018) suggestion, the researcher created an annotated bibliography that served as an index for each of these documents, which allowed for easy retrieval.

The database's narrative compilations folder included all documents that the researcher used to organize material. Qualitative research uses coding systems to sort collected data by themes in order to organize the information in a useful manner (Stake, 2010). The coding process identifies a large number of codes, which the researcher then abstracts into distinct themes (Rosenthal, 2016). The researcher ultimately developed themes by analyzing all interview transcripts, field notes, documentation, and archival records. The researcher used color coding to easily differentiate study themes in all data sources. The researcher transcribed all data from each of the study's final themes into individual Word files. For example, all documentation, archival record, and direct observation notes and content that pertained to the theme of communication were transcribed into one Word document. In order to complete intra-case and cross-case analysis, the researcher organized the data according to case site within the files. The researcher used NVivo to organize data and themes for all case study evidence. The researcher collected a large amount of data and NVivo enabled the researcher to more easily code and categorize that data (Yin, 2018).

The researcher took numerous steps to ensure the security of all case study data. According to Arwood and Panicker (2019), researchers can accomplish the safeguarding of data by immediately removing all identifiers, using computer passwords, and storing information on computers without Internet access. First, as previously mentioned, the researcher removed all direct identifiers for participants as soon as possible after the interviews and transcripts were completed. Second, the researcher stored the case study database on a password-protected computer that was not connected to the Internet. Third, the researcher was the only individual who used the computer at any time and who had access to the computer's password. Finally, when not working on the case study, the researcher stored all paper notes and informed consent forms etc. in a locked file cabinet only accessible by the researcher.

Summary of Data Collection and Organization

This study included two main instruments, semi-structured interviews, and the researcher. The researcher developed two interview guides that included open-ended questions designed to answer the study's four research questions. In addition to using interviews, the researcher also collected evidence from archival records, documentation, and direct observation. The researcher organized all evidence, in addition to case study notes and narrative compilations, in a case study database. Finally, the researcher secured the database on a password-protected computer without Internet access and removed all participant identifiers from the database.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a process designed to sort and classify collected data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Yin (2018) suggests beginning data analysis by choosing one of four general analytic strategies, which include relying on theoretical propositions, starting first with the data by noticing patterns and concepts, developing case descriptions, and examining reasonable rival explanations. In this study, the researcher first relied on theoretical propositions regarding the leadership behaviors and actions taken by chamber leaders and their impact on member engagement and retention. In qualitative research, the data analysis process includes five main components: organizing data, reading and memoing initial ideas, using coding to reduce the data into themes, interpreting the data, and depicting the data visually or with a discussion (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The previous section discussed the researcher's data organization techniques, and the below sections cover the remaining four components of the researcher's data analysis process.

Emergent Ideas

Following the collection of all of the data, the researcher began the process of exploring the entire case study database. Scanning the entire database enables a researcher to create a "sense of the data as a whole without getting caught up in the details of coding" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 188). While reading all of the evidence, the researcher wrote notes/memos in the margins of all interview transcripts, documentation, field notes, and archival data in order to synthesize the data into a higher level of analytic meaning. The researcher then segmented and documented the ideas and concepts discovered in each source of evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Coding Themes

After memoing, the researcher began the coding process. Coding is essential in qualitative research and involves the researcher making sense of all the text collected from the sources of evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Coding is the process of identifying parts of meaning in data and marking them with a code, which includes either a word or short phrase that encapsulates meaning (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Coding allows a researcher to develop thorough insights into data, makes the data easily accessible and retrievable, provides a structure for comparison of the data, ensures transparency and validity, and gives a voice to the study's participants (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019).

Researchers complete coding with an inductive, deductive, or blended approach (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Inductive coding develops codes directly from the data, whereas deductive coding uses a pre-defined list of codes created before the coding process based on known concepts in the existing literature (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). A blended approach includes both inductive and deductive coding and is the most commonly used approach in qualitative research (Graebner, et al., 2012). The researcher used the blended coding approach in order to remain open to new concepts in the data, while also remaining cognizant of the themes in the existing literature on member engagement in nonprofit associations (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). The researcher also utilized first- and second-cycle coding. First-cycle coding includes creating descriptive codes in addition to attribution codes, which assign codes to larger segments of data, such as the interviews and observation notes (Saldana, 2015). Second-cycle coding includes refinement of initial codes, exploring patterns across first-cycle codes, categorizing codes, and exploring patterns across descriptive and attribute codes (Saldana, 2015). The researcher used NVivo, a data management software program, to assist with the coding process of all case study evidence, in addition to traditional coding methods (Rosenthal, 2016). When initially reviewing all case study evidence from interviews, documentation, archival records, and direct observation, the researcher used highlighting to distinguish various codes. Then, the researcher used NVivo to create codes that eventually were linked to the study's themes. The researcher created a codebook, which included a name of each code, a description, and example(s) of the code using case study data from each case per research best practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Upon completing the coding process, the researcher began looking for themes/categories of information, which normally involves identifying five to seven general themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) define themes as larger units of information that include numerous codes. The researcher used a combination of Creswell and Poth's (2018) suggested strategies for theme development, which included highlighting, memoing, pattern matching, and creating diagrams.

Interpretations

Following the completion of the coding process, the next data analysis step involves identifying themes, patterns, and relationships within the collected data (Yin, 2018), and making judgments about what is meaningful (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interpretation includes drawing out larger meaning from the data, beyond the codes and themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and making conclusions regarding the collected data (Lindgreen et al., 2020). Interpretation oftentimes involves linking the researcher's interpretation to the existing research, which the researcher did in this multiple case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher first completed a within-case analysis, which considered themes and patterns with the data of each inclusive case site (Lindgreen et al., 2020). Then, the researcher completed a cross-case analysis, which identified similarities and differences on key concepts between the two case sites and allowed the researcher to see common patterns (Lindgreen et al., 2020).

Data Representation

The final phase of data analysis includes representing and visualizing the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher summarized the findings of the multiple case study according to theme and provided comparisons and contrasts between the two case study sites in the final report. The researcher also used visual tables to illustrate the identified themes and the similarities and differences between the two case sites with regards to member engagement strategies. In addition, the researcher used a visual table to summarize the final recommended member engagement best practices for chambers of commerce.

Analysis for Triangulation

Triangulation serves the researcher well because this approach provides a deeper understanding of the research problem and reveals findings that the researcher may not detect if the researcher only uses a single method (Renz et al., 2018). Four types of triangulation include methods triangulation (use of quantitative and qualitative data), investigator triangulation (use of one or more coders or analysts), theoretical triangulation (use of numerous theories regarding a hypothesis), and data analysis triangulation (Renz et al., 2018). The researcher used data analysis triangulation in this study, which uses two or more methods to analyze data (Renz et al., 2018). NVivo enabled the researcher to count the incidence of words and codes and then locate the codes within all of the data sources (Yin, 2018). The researcher was then able to confirm that codes, which eventually were developed into themes, either appeared or did not appear throughout the various sources of evidence that pertained to each case study site. Then, the researcher performed a qualitative analysis of the evidence with the understanding of which codes and eventual themes consistently appeared throughout the evidence.

Summary of Data Analysis

The researcher used memoing, coding, interpretation, and visual representation to complete data analysis. The researcher began by memoing, which familiarized the researcher with all of the data in the case study database. Then the researcher used a blended approach to coding along with first- and second-cycle coding. This process resulted in the identification of numerous themes in the study. Upon identifying the themes, the researcher completed both within-case and cross-case analyses in order to make conclusions about the collected data. Finally, the researcher depicted and summarized the data and conclusions using numerous tables and a written report.

Reliability and Validity

Qualitative case study researchers must address reliability and validity concerns (Lindgreen et al., 2020). Various methodical strategies exist to ensure the validity and reliability of qualitative research (Noble & Smith, 2015). Because qualitative research involves the interaction between the researcher and phenomenon, it is a challenge to evaluate research quality given the multitude of perspectives held by researchers (Lindgreen et al., 2020). Validity aims to ensure that a study does not simply reflect the researcher's personal interpretation (Lindgreen et al., 2020), and reliability demonstrates that a researcher could repeat a study and discover the same results (Yin, 2018). The following sections discuss this study's approach to ensuring validity and reliability.

Reliability

The goal of reliability is to reduce any errors or bias in a study (Yin, 2018). Reliability also pertains to using a research approach that is both consistent and well documented (Bolderston, 2012). Lindgreen et al. (2020) recommends that developing an interview protocol and a case study database are two best practices to achieve reliability. Bolderston (2012) also states that ensuring the accuracy of transcripts and the consistent use of coding contributes to reliability.

This study used an interview protocol, case study database, a code book, and two recording devices that assisted in transcription in order to achieve reliability. The researcher developed two interview guides, which include a set list of questions in addition to potential clarifying and probing questions. This ensured that the researcher posed the same questions to all interview participants. The researcher also used a case study database, which Yin (2018) highly advocates given its ability to increase reliability. In addition, the researcher used both Webex closed captioning and an iPhone application to ensure proper recording of the interviews. When creating the interview transcripts, the researcher used both recordings to ensure accuracy. Following the transcription, the researcher provided each interviewee the opportunity to review the transcription. Finally, the researcher created a code book, which included the name of each code, a description, and example(s) of the code, using case study data from each case. This methodology helped to ensure that the researcher consistently applied the codes and eventual themes across all data.

Validity

A study's validity pertains to its "credibility, authenticity, transferability, dependability, and confirmability" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 256). Researchers can ensure the validity of quality case studies using three design tests: construct validity, internal validity, and external validity (Lindgreen et al., 2020). Construct validity ensures that researchers use operational measures for the concepts under study (Yin, 2018). Internal validity only applies to explanatory and causal studies, which seek to establish a causal relationship (Lindgreen et al., 2020). Explanatory and causal studies' research designs will fail to have internal validity if the researcher concludes that a causal relationship exists between two variables when, in fact, the cause is the result of a third variable (Yin, 2018). Finally, external validity illustrates the ability to generalize a case study's findings (Yin, 2018). The researcher used numerous strategies to ensure construct, internal, and external validity in this study. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest that researchers use at least two validation strategies, and the researcher surpassed this baseline in this study.

The researcher utilized triangulation, saturation, member checking, and rich case descriptions to accomplish construct validity. Triangulation is the use of multiple sources of evidence/data in conjunction with individual interviews (Bolderston, 2012). Triangulation is one of the most commonly used methods to ensure validity in qualitative research (Olson et al., 2016). A case study's conclusions are more convincing and accurate if a researcher uses multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2018). This study included the use of interviews, documentation, archival records, and direct observations. By drawing upon multiple sources of evidence, the researcher ensured the corroboration of the study's themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Triangulation is closely related to saturation, which the researcher also used to ensure validity (Hayashi et al., 2019). Data saturation is the gold standard for quality research (Saunders et al., 2018), and its use in this study resulted in in-depth and rich data (Hayashi et al., 2019). The researcher also used member checking, which is the process of asking interview participants to review transcripts and confirm their accuracy (Bolderston, 2012). All interview participants reviewed transcripts of their interviews and provided changes/edits, if necessary. Finally, the researcher created rich case descriptions, which enable the study's readers to evaluate transferability of the study's results to other settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Pattern matching serves as one approach that enables researchers to address internal validity (Lindgreen et al., 2020). Yin (2018) argues that pattern matching is a desirable tactic in case studies because the technique markedly strengthens internal validity. Pattern matching logic involves comparing the empirical pattern from a case study's findings to a predicated pattern created prior to data collection (Yin, 2018). When similar patterns occur, then the researcher has increased internal validity (Yin, 2018). The researcher used pattern matching in this study, and also completed a cross-case analysis that compared the patterns in each case.

In order to ensure external validity, the researcher used replication logic and specification of the population, two primary ways to accomplish external validity (Lindgreen et al., 2020). As previously discussed, the researcher selected the two cases in this study because she considered them literal replications. Similar analytic conclusions that result from two independent cases are more powerful (Yin, 2018). Additionally, the researcher provided a detailed description of each case study site and its context, thus allowing the reader to understand the population of interest and determine whether or not the reader could apply the study's conclusions to different settings.

Bracketing

Bracketing involves researchers setting aside their experiences and looking at the studied phenomenon with a fresh perspective and open mind (Tufford & Newman, 2010; Creswell & Poth, 2018). A researcher accomplishes bracketing by summarizing his or her own experiences with a phenomenon and then "bracketing out" those particular views prior to analyzing the experiences of others (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As previously summarized in this section, the researcher used the memo method of bracketing throughout data analysis, which enabled the researcher to examine and reflect upon her engagement with the data (Tufford & Newman, 2010). This approach allowed the researcher to develop numerous insights as she completed data analysis (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

Summary of Reliability and Validity

The researcher used multiple methods to ensure establish the validity and reliability of this study. The researcher addressed construct validity by using triangulation, saturation, member checking, and rich case descriptions. Pattern matching was used to address internal validity and the use of both replication logic and specification of the population addressed external validity. The researcher used an interview protocol, case study database, a code book, and two recording devises in order to ensure the reliability of the study. Finally, the researcher utilized bracketing in order to address bias in the study originating from the researcher’s own experiences with member engagement in chambers of commerce.

Summary of Section 2 and Transition

This section summarized how the researcher conducted the study. The researcher’s role was multifaceted in this study, as she selected the case study sites and participants, and also collected, organized, and analyzed data. This section addressed why the qualitative flexible design using a multiple case study method was the best choice for this study given the posed research questions. This section also defined the eligible participants in this study and the sampling techniques used by the researcher to select the final participants. The researcher collected four types of evidence in this study and organized all study data using a case study database with three components. Finally, this section summarized the process that the researcher used to complete data analysis and reviewed the numerous techniques that the researcher used to ensure validity and reliability of the study, including the use of bracketing to address bias.

The next section presents an overview of the study and the findings of the study. The findings of the study include the discovered themes, interpretation of the themes, and representation and visualization of the data. In addition, the findings of the study also address the relationship of the findings to the study’s research questions, conceptual framework, anticipated themes, literature, and problem. The next section also includes a discussion on how the study’s findings can improve general business practices and potential application strategies that chambers of commerce can use to strengthen their member engagement approaches. Finally, the researcher gives recommendations for further study and reflects upon the biblical perspective of the study and her personal and professional growth.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implication for Change

Overview of the Study

This qualitative multiple case study examined two chambers of commerce in Northeast Ohio in order to understand the best leadership strategies for engaging members. The purpose of the study was to add to the scholarly body of knowledge by discovering effective strategies to engage chamber of commerce members, developing a leadership model for member engagement, and identifying best practices that chamber of commerce leaders should use to engage members. The study sought to highlight the importance of member engagement in chambers of commerce and provide leaders with a leadership model and list of best practices that would assist them in strengthening their approach for supporting and increasing member engagement.

An intermediary introduced the researcher to numerous chambers of commerce executive directors at Northeast Ohio chambers of commerce that most likely fit the study's criteria (suburban location, above average retention rate, paid staff members, and member counts less than 750). The researcher then contacted those leaders and ultimately received permission to use two of the chambers of commerce as case study sites, which met the study criteria.

Both executive directors worked closely with the researcher and helped her identify potential study participants, which included both chamber leaders (paid staff and volunteers) and engaged members. The researcher used quota sampling for engaged members to ensure that the study's sample included different genders, ages/generations, and length of memberships. Using email invitations, the researcher secured interviews with 21 total chamber leaders and engaged members at both case study sites. The researcher used two interviews guides (Appendices B and C) during semi-structured virtual interviews and concluded interviews upon saturation. Using two guides enabled the researcher to ask different questions to each group of participants, chamber leaders and engaged members. The researcher recorded the interviews using Webex and completed transcriptions, which all participants reviewed for accuracy. In addition to interviews, the researcher collected documentation and archival records, and completed numerous direct observations (both virtual and in person) at both case study sites.

Following data collection, the researcher used NVivo to analyze all data and develop seven primary themes and additional sub-themes found in the data. The discovered themes closely aligned with the study's conceptual framework/leadership model for member engagement, which the researcher developed following an extensive literature review. The next section provides a detailed summary of the study's findings.

Presentation of the Findings

This section includes an analysis and interpretation of data collected during this qualitative multiple case study. The researcher collected data that included documentation, archival records, interviews, and direct observations from the two chamber of commerce case study sites. Interviews accounted for the majority of data collected, during which the researcher asked a series of questions to leaders (Appendix B) and engaged members (Appendix C). The questions sought to discover challenges that negatively impact member engagement and strategies that leaders use to positively impact member engagement. In addition, the researcher sought to discover the best membership engagement practices of leaders, and to understand how leader strategies impact member retention. The researcher asked questions that addressed each of the four member engagement dimensions to ensure a comprehensive approach. Following the completion of data collection, the researcher uploaded all data to the qualitative software NVivo and then used the software to code all data. After coding, the researcher used an NVivo-produced diagram to identify coding relationships and final study themes. NVivo enabled the researcher to apply data analysis triangulation, thereby confirming that codes and final themes were present throughout the various sources of data that pertained to each case study site. In this section, the researcher presents the findings of within-case analyses for each chamber of commerce and the findings of a cross-case analysis between the two chamber of commerce case study sites. The researcher also discusses the relationship of the study findings to the study's research questions, conceptual framework, anticipated themes, literature review, and stated research problem.

Case Study Chambers of Commerce

This study focused on collecting data from two distinct chambers of commerce in Northeast Ohio, referred to in this study as Chambers A and B. The below paragraphs provide descriptions of the two chambers of commerce. Both chambers of commerce provide very similar benefits and have similar board and committee structures. Both chambers of commerce also have similar staffing levels. The main differences between the two chambers pertain to service area and total number of members.

Chamber A.

Chamber A is located in a Northeast Ohio suburb and serves businesses in eight different cities in one county. Chamber A currently has approximately 520 members that operate in numerous industries. Chamber A's pre-COVID-19 retention rate was 89%. A volunteer board composed of 12 chamber members provides oversight to two full-time and one part-time staff member. Numerous volunteers support the activities of the chamber and comprise the membership of seven standing committees and occasional ad hoc committees.

Chamber A provides numerous benefits to its members, including networking and special events, savings programs, certificate of origin processing, and various advertising opportunities. Available member savings programs cover healthcare, energy, prescription drugs, office supplies, shipping, Constant Contact email services, and workers compensation. Chamber A also has a professional development grant program that provides up to $250 to members for professional development activities. In addition to hosting regular monthly networking events, Chamber A also provides large, specialized events throughout the year, such as a popular and well-attended golf outing, job fairs, industry-specific promotion events, and more. Chamber A receives income from membership dues, program income, sale of sponsorships/advertising opportunities, financial investments, and residual income from affinity programs.

Chamber A leaders provided the researcher with documentation that included board meeting agendas and minutes for the past two years. Using Web searches, the researcher also located numerous newspaper articles on Chamber A. Archival records for Chamber A included the chamber's website, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram accounts. Chamber A also provided the researcher with recent member survey reports, service records that summarized retention rates, and strategic plans and reports. The researcher completed four direct observations at Chamber A, which included board and marketing committee meetings, one virtual learning event, and an in-person networking event. All of the meetings and events were held over a four-week period.

The researcher completed 11 virtual interviews using Webex during a three-week time frame, which included interviews of six Chamber A leaders and five engaged Chamber A members. The researcher discontinued interviews once she achieved saturation for each study group (leaders and engaged members). The leaders who participated in interviews included all

Chamber A staff members, the board chair, and the chairs of the membership and marketing committees. The engaged members who participated in interviews included three females and two males. One engaged member was a boomer, three were Generation X, and one was a millennial. Three engaged members had been members of Chamber A for longer than 5 years, and two engaged members had been members for less than five years. Within this study, the researcher refers to Chamber A leaders as CAL1, CAL2 etc. and engaged Chamber A members as CAM1, CAM2 etc.

Chamber B.

Chamber B is located in a Northeast Ohio suburb and serves businesses in one city. Chamber B currently has approximately 400 members that operate in numerous industries. Chamber B’s pre-COVID-19 retention rate was 87%. A volunteer board composed of 14 chamber members provides oversight to three full-time and one part-time staff member. Numerous volunteers support the activities of the chamber and comprise the membership of seven standing committees and occasional ad hoc committees.

Chamber B provides numerous benefits to its members, including networking and special events, savings programs, certificate of origin processing, and numerous advertising opportunities. Savings programs available to members cover healthcare, energy, prescription drugs, office supplies, shipping, Constant Contact services, and workers compensation. In addition to having regular monthly networking events, Chamber B also provides large, specialized events throughout the year, such as a popular and well-attended golf outing, leadership events, and job fairs. Chamber B receives income from membership dues, program income, sale of sponsorships/advertising opportunities, investment fund income, and residual income from affinity programs.

Chamber B leaders provided the researcher with documentation that included board meeting and membership committee agendas and minutes for the past two years. The researcher also located numerous newspaper articles on Chamber B. Archival records for Chamber B included the chamber's website and YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram accounts. Chamber B also provided the researcher with recent member survey reports, service records that summarized retention rates, and strategic plans and reports. The researcher completed three direct observations at Chamber B, which included a board meeting and two in-person networking events. All of the meetings and events were held over a three-week period.

The researcher completed 10 interviews during a four-week time frame, which included interviews of five Chamber B leaders and five engaged Chamber B members. The researcher discontinued interviews once she achieved saturation for each study group (leaders and engaged members). The leaders who participated in interviews included all Chamber B staff members, the board vice chair, and the chair of the program committee. The engaged members who participated in interviews included two females and three males. Two engaged members were boomers, two were generation X, and one was a millennial. Three engaged members had been members for longer than 5 years and two engaged members had been members for less than five years. Within this study, the researcher refers to Chamber B leaders as CBL1, CBL2 etc. and engaged Chamber B members as CBM1, CBM2 etc.

Themes Discovered

The researcher discovered seven prominent themes (Figure 2) and numerous accompanying subthemes (Tables 2 and 3) from the analysis of the 21 virtual interviews, documentation, archival records, and direct observations that pertained to member engagement at the two chamber of commerce case study sites. With the exception of a few subthemes, the researcher discussed all of the discovered themes and a significant majority of the subthemes in this study's literature review. While all the main themes were prevalent in both case study sites, all subthemes did not apply to data gathered from both chambers of commerce. The researcher discovered other themes, such as member attraction; however, those themes did not directly pertain to member engagement. The below narrative summarizes the discovered themes and subthemes. In addition, Table 2 below shows a summary and comparison of the themes and subthemes mentioned by leaders and members at Chambers A and B.

Table 2

Comparison of Study Themes and Subthemes Mentioned by Leaders and Engaged Members at Chambers A and B

Study Themes	Chamber A		Chamber B	
	Leader	Member	Leader	Member
Strong, trusting relationships				
Make a personal connection – Connect with members	X	X	X	X
Display integrity – Lead by example, have morals, display fairness, and keep promises	X	X		

Study Themes	Chamber A		Chamber B	
	Leader	Member	Leader	Member
Strong, trusting relationships – Continued				
Ensure responsiveness - Listen and respond to needs	X	X	X	X
Seek feedback using meetings, emails surveys and/or phone calls	X	X	X	
Show benevolence - Show caring behaviors and commitment to members	X	X	X	X
Take voluntary action – Perform unrequired items/actions		X	X	X
Meeting members' needs and motivations by providing valuable benefits				
Provide value	X	X	X	X
Cost savings	X	X	X	X
Connections/networking	X	X	X	X
Visibility	X	X	X	X
Varied and quality learning programs	X	X		X
Community impact		X		X
Flexible approach (scheduling and/or dues etc.)	X	X	X	
Informational resources	X		X	X
Use creativity	X	X	X	X

Study Themes	Chamber A		Chamber B	
	Leader	Member	Leader	Member
Welcoming and community-based culture				
Provide inclusive, open minded, and welcoming environment	X	X		X
Display positivity	X	X	X	X
Encourage camaraderie, teamwork, and collaboration	X	X	X	X
Strategic planning				
Set mission	X	X	X	
Set vision		X	X	
Develop measurable goals	X	X	X	
Collect data	X	X	X	
Measure results	X	X	X	
Provide support (pertains primarily to volunteers)				
Connect skills with opportunities	X	X	X	
Offer training and guidelines	X		X	
Show appreciation	X	X	X	X
Use empowerment	X		X	
Present awards/recognition*				
Communication				
Provide consistent, clear, and frequent communication that communicates value	X	X	X	X

Study Themes	Chamber A		Chamber B	
	Leader	Member	Leader	Member
Communication – Continued				
Effective message design	X		X	
Use various channels (social media, email, phone, website, text messages, event announcements, and handwritten notes	X	X	X	X
Customize messages	X	X	X	X
Segmentation	X		X	
Personal appeals and member visits	X	X	X	X
Host member onboardings	X	X	X	
Group events	X		X	
One-on-one	X	X	X	
Lack of time and resources				
Work and personal conflicts	X	X	X	X
Lack of organization resources including working capital and staffing	X	X	X	X

* Study subthemes not mentioned by leaders or members but found in documentation and/or archival data.

Strong, Trusting Relationships.

Strong and healthy relationships drive the highest-value opportunities for member engagement in associations (Gammel, 2011), and trust serves as the foundation of healthy relationships (Thompson, 2018). The presence of trust in a relationship supports commitment (Crane, 2018), positive donor behavior (Alhidari et al., 2018), and volunteer satisfaction and retention (Dal Corso et al., 2019). In the specific case of associations, the relationships that members have with others within an association are critical for building trust (Huang & Chen, 2016). Chamber leaders and engaged chamber members in this study discussed five of six trust dimensions in alignment with Crane's (2018) holistic stakeholder trust model, which comprise the majority of subthemes under this theme. The five trust dimensions include integrity, benevolence, responsiveness, voluntary action, and transparency. For organizational purposes in this study, the researcher discussed transparency under the theme of communication and referred to transparency as the subtheme of providing consistent, clear, and frequent communication. In addition, the researcher addressed the trust dimension of responsiveness, which consists of listening and responding to needs, under strong, trusting relationships and the second major study theme of meeting member needs and motivations by providing benefits. The researcher discovered a sixth subtheme pertaining to strong, trusting relationships, which includes the importance of making personal connections with leaders and others in the organization.

Meeting Members' Needs and Motivations by Providing Valuable Benefits.

Research has shown that members engage less with organizations that do not meet their needs and motivations (Hung & Hager, 2020); therefore, leaders must identify member needs and motivations and provide benefits that match those needs and motivations (Ki & Wang, 2016). Chamber leaders and engaged chamber members in this study repeatedly discussed the subtheme of providing value to chamber members. A key role of associations includes providing value to members (Stoffel, 2015). Chamber leaders and engaged chamber members discussed the value provided through private incentive benefits including cost savings, connections/networking, visibility, varied and quality learning programs, flexible approaches and informational resources. In addition, chamber leaders and engaged chamber members discussed the public incentive benefit and value of the chambers' impact on the broader community. The second subtheme in meeting members' needs and motivations included the importance of using creativity to meet members' needs and motivations.

Welcoming and Community-Based Culture.

The organizational culture of an association significantly impacts the association's ability to attract, retain, and engage members (Sladek, 2011). Association members value welcoming (Doyle & Oser, 2016), positive, and community focused cultures (Sladek, 2011). Three subthemes pertaining to organizational culture were prevalent throughout the comments of chamber leaders and engaged chamber members who participated in this study. Those themes included providing an inclusive, open-minded, and welcoming environment; displaying positivity; and encouraging camaraderie, teamwork, and collaboration.

Strategic Planning.

Due to increasing competition and the growing demands of stakeholders, strategic planning in nonprofit organizations, including the creation of a mission, vision, and organization goals, has become a critical process to ensure organizational survival (Laurett & Ferreira, 2018). When an association has clear mission and vision statements, and goals, the association's leaders can more effectively focus on providing value to members (Soker, 2016). Chamber leaders in this study expressed the importance of having a set mission and vision, as well as measurable goals. Specifically, chamber leaders in both organizations have defined goals that pertain to member engagement, and they frequently discuss those goals and the strategies designed to accomplish them.

Providing Support.

Volunteers provide services critical to the success of associations, and therefore, leaders must support volunteers in order to retain and engage them (Wang & Ki, 2018). Chamber leaders and engaged chamber members in this study specifically mentioned six topics (subthemes) that comprise the theme of providing support. Those subthemes in large part align with Alfes et al.'s (2016) concepts of task-oriented and emotion-oriented support. The identified subtheme that pertains to task-oriented support includes offering training and guidelines. Identified subthemes that pertain to emotion-oriented support include showing appreciation and presenting awards. The researcher also discovered additional subthemes of connecting members' skills with volunteering opportunities and using empowerment to engage volunteers.

When determining the study's final themes, the researcher realized that she could categorize providing support as a main theme or a subtheme of meeting members' needs and motivations by providing valuable benefits. The researcher chose to make providing support a main theme for the following reasons. First, volunteers serve as a critical component of nonprofit organizations (Harp et al., 2017), and without volunteer support many nonprofits would have to reduce or discontinue services (Harp et al., 2017, Fleming, 2018). Chambers A and B heavily rely on volunteer support to lead both organizations, plan and implement programs/events, and secure donations. Both Chamber A and B each have over 60 active member volunteers that contribute thousands of volunteer hours each year. Given the impact of volunteers on the ultimate success of Chambers A and B, the researcher presented the theme of providing support as a main theme in order to recognize and draw additional attention to its importance. Second, this study's literature review discussed Bennett's (2000) two categories of benefits that individuals receive as members of associations: private and public incentives. Private incentives include economic, occupational, social, and informational benefits (Li & Barbieri, 2019). An economic benefit example includes increased revenues for members and an occupational benefit example includes access to professional contacts (Li & Barbieri, 2019). Social benefits include social and recreational activities that associations only provide to members (Knoke, 1988), while informational benefits include items such as data services, newsletters, conferences, and workshops that the association provides to members (Hager, 2014). Public benefits benefit the greater whole of the membership and/or community (Bennett, 2000). The six subthemes of providing support do not align well with the categories of private and public incentives and therefore the researcher decided to categorize providing support as a main theme.

Communication.

The most prevalent theme discussed numerous times by all of the study's participants was communication. Effective communication is critical in associations because effective communication helps to secure member participation (Jones, 2016; Lagaras, 2016), and commitment (Lagaras, 2016). Effective communication also engages volunteers (Kang, 2016, Nesbit, 2018; Bauer & Lim, 2019; Milbourn et al., 2019) and supports the retention and engagement of donors (Gazley & Dignam, 2010; Naskrent & Siebelt, 2011; Aldihari, 2018). Comments from leaders and members emphasized the importance of three communication subthemes, including the provision of consistent, clear, and frequent communication that conveys value; customization of messages; and the significant value of a formal orientation process that includes in-person and one-on-one new member orientations. As previously mentioned, consistent, clear and frequent communication aligns with transparency, one of the six dimensions of building trust.

Lack of Time and Resources.

Like communication, the final theme of lack of time and resources was prevalent in the comments of both chamber leaders and engaged chamber members of both case study sites. Significant competition exists for association members' attention, attendance, time, and money (Charney, 2015). Plus, members (Hight, 2011; Jacobs, 2014; Gorringe, 2017) and association leaders (Hight, 2011; Soker, 2016) may face insufficient resources, which negatively impact member engagement and leader strategies for engagement. Chamber leaders and engaged chamber members openly discussed how the lack of time and resources negatively impacted member engagement. Two subthemes emerged as part of this theme, which included work and personal conflicts and the lack of organizational resources (working capital and staffing).

Interpretation of the Themes

As previously mentioned, the researcher completed a within-case analysis for each chamber of commerce case study site and a cross-case analysis between the two sites. The below paragraphs in this section discuss the findings of the three analyses organized by theme.

Chamber A.

Strong, Trusting Relationships.

Comments from leaders and engaged members of Chamber A pertained to all six of the subthemes of strong, trusting relationships: making personal connections, integrity (leading by example), benevolence (showing caring behavior and commitment), responsiveness (listening and responding to needs), voluntary action (motivated to do more than is required), and transparency (discussed within the theme of communication).

When working to support member engagement CAL1 stated:

> "I try to build a personal connection with them, and I try to share my story. I had a really great experience with the chamber of commerce when I was planning my practice. I could not imagine starting without the chamber. So I share my story with the people in it and then my personal connection to the chamber then becomes their personal connection to maybe me, and how their experience could be similar because I think it is. It is a personal thing that is required. That personal relationship building is essential."

CAL3 and CAL4 also mentioned the importance of making personal connections with members in order to sustain their member engagement. CAL3 expressed how challenging COVID-19 has been because she was unable to see and visit in person with members with whom she has developed relationships. Because of the recent lack of in person connections, CAL3 remarked that chamber leaders began calling all members to maintain relationships. CAL3 stated, "We wanted to have that personal touch and we wanted to let them know that we were there for them if they needed us for anything. We wanted them to know that our relationship with them was important." CAL3 also stated that she believes the "personal connection is what keeps members committed to the chamber." In addition, CAL4 stressed the importance of the personal connection and touch needed to secure member engagement; she stated, "I think it is all in the personal connection."

Leaders and members in Chamber A considered personal connections with members a best practice in the chamber. CAL5 remarked that "The personal touch and connection, the phone call, seeing them at a meeting are huge." CAL 5 also stated that "connecting is critical…being able to connect with members in some form makes all of the difference." CAL4 explained that, at events, board members try to sit at different tables and talk to members so that they connect and build relationships. CAL4 also remarked that "nothing really beats a personal connection" and leaders have to make it a priority to "connect with people making it a little more personal." CAM5 expressed that she appreciates when chamber leaders initiate conversations with her at events and that those connections have meaning to her. CAM1 also stated that his "personal relationships with chamber leaders have been incredibly important."

Chamber A leaders and engaged members agreed that personal connections impact member retention. CAL1 stated that "It is hard to say no to someone that you've built a relationship with. It is easy to say no to a person listed on a piece of paper, but not a relationship." CAL3 also remarked that members appreciate when chamber leaders call them to keep connected and she thinks those calls make a difference when they seek to renew their membership. CAM2 stated that "The more you volunteer, the more people you get to know and connect with, which makes it easy to network and that makes it an easy decision to renew."

Chamber A engaged members and leaders saw value in leaders leading by example and having integrity, which according to Crane (2018) involves having morals, being fair, and keeping promises. CAL4 discussed the importance of leading by example when it comes to volunteering and donating to the chamber. CAL4 stated, "I just try to lead by example. I mean if you ask us to do something and we are going to do it, just do it." CAL5 also stated that "We have to do what we say we are going to do, or members won't stick around. We have to deliver what we told them we would." CAM1 expressed frustration with the extent that chamber leaders try to show fairness to all members; CAM1 stated, "I understand that they don't want to play favorites, but it is still frustrating to me." Despite this frustration, CAM1 praised chamber leaders for their fortitude and their leadership styles.

CAM1 expressed that the example set by leaders in Chamber A is a best practice and CAM4 agreed when she stated that they show honesty and "They are true to themselves about who they are. They are who they say they are, they act the same way about what they talk about." CAM5 specifically mentioned the importance of integrity and how the Chamber A leaders' "ability to make ethical choices" is a best practice. CAM1 elaborated upon this concept when she discussed the importance of:

> "Leading by example and having visible efforts, not just talking the talk, but walking the walk. There is a bit in the chamber culture that involves a lot of talking and not a lot of doing and I think that you lose people when you just talk about a lot of things, but you do not actually do anything. And so I think I tend to be a little bit more effective because I am a doer. I do not just talk about things."

The subtheme of benevolence, or care and commitment to members, was mentioned numerous times. CAL6 stated that "If members feel like they are wanted and that people care, I think it makes all the difference. So that is what we try to do." CAM4 confirmed that she felt cared for when she stated:

> "I feel that they care about me as an individual, not just as a member. They have that caring component of the individual, not just the business. They are there if you have a problem, and they take care of that problem immediately and they keep you informed."

Both CAM2 and CAM4 considered the caring approach of Chamber A leaders a best practice that significantly contributed to their engagement. CAM1 discussed how the caring approach of Chamber A leaders was evident in their service-oriented mindset. According to CAM1, “They want their members to make more money and be successful. They actually want those things. So I’m not sure what leadership that would come down to but that is what it is.” CAM2 echoed this assessment by stating that the actions of Chamber A leaders give her the strong “sense that the chamber is an organization that cares about its members.” CAL4 stressed the importance of caring for members when she stated that “I think it is important that we let the members know how important they are and how much we care for them and their success.” According to CAM4, the caring approach from Chamber A leaders provides a large reason why she renews her membership. She expressed how Chamber A differs from many of the chambers that she belongs to because its leaders constantly reach out to her and care about her both as a business and a person.

Another dimension that builds trusting relationships is listening and responding to needs, which serves as a strength of Chamber A, according to its leaders and engaged members. CAL5 and CAL6 spent a significant amount of time discussing the various actions that they take to listen and respond to member needs. CAL5 discussed how chamber leaders oftentimes call members, particularly less engaged members and ask, “How is it going? What is your biggest challenge right now? How can we help you out?” She also told a story about a member who purchased a large sponsorship after which she instructed her staff to contact the company and determine the specific needs that the business had, such as visibility or staffing needs, so that Chamber A could best use those sponsorship dollars to help them meet their needs. CAL6 stated that:

> "The biggest thing I always tell people is that I am here to help you in any way you need me, so just let me know what I can do. Call, text or email me. We are here for you, and we want to meet your needs. I think building that trust right away goes a long way."

CAL6's comments illustrate that Chamber A leaders communicate with members regarding their needs using telephone calls, emails, and texts. In addition, Chamber A leaders complete numerous surveys throughout the year asking for feedback and input from members so that they can effectively respond to needs. CAL5 specifically mentioned a survey that leaders use to assist the programming committee to develop topics for educational events. CAL5 stated that "Those survey responses don't just sit there. They're looking at the survey and what the survey is saying that these folks are looking for." The researcher also observed a Chamber A leader asking for feedback on chamber programming during a general networking meeting and board members discussing survey feedback and how the leaders would implement the feedback during a board meeting. Therefore, Chamber A is using multiple methods to listen to members and seek their feedback.

Chamber A engaged members CAM2 and CAM5 expressed that the chamber leaders' approach of listening to their needs is a best practice. When asked which of the chamber leaders' actions best supported her commitment to the organization, CAM2 stated "I would say their openness to conversations related to me specifically with my business, you know, what are my needs?" CAM5 also saw significant value when Chamber A leaders have asked her how the chamber can help her and her business in specific areas. CAL1 and CAL5 specifically mentioned the skill of listening as a best practice. CAL1 expressed that leaders must "hear what that member is seeking from their membership" and then "integrate that feedback" into everything that the chamber does. CAL5 agreed with the importance of this approach. She stated that the chamber prioritizes:

> “Listening, really understanding what their expectations are, or more so what their challenges are, and trying to help them with resources and things that will be able to help them in that area…in addition to making sure you are giving them what they want in terms of workshops. I am always looking for feedback. What can we do differently? How can we do this better?”

The final dimension of building trusting relationships presented at Chamber A is the use of voluntary action, which according to Crane (2018) includes taking unrequired or nonobligatory actions. CAM6 expressed that his colleagues always do more than what is required.

> “There are so many cases where I have seen them go out of their way to help people. I mean calls at 8pm or on the weekend or stopping in and dropping stuff off or having a private Zoom meeting to help them with something. They are always giving them ideas on what they can be doing to help their business. I just think they are always going above and beyond.”

This approach was certainly noticed by CAM4 who stated that voluntary action is a best practice in her opinion. According to CAM4:

> “They go above and beyond to help members. They are always doing that. Five years ago I started over in this particular area. Nobody knew who we are, what we did, and this was the first chamber I joined. I told (Chamber A leader) what my problem was and because she is who she is, she started giving me ideas. She really spent a lot of time with me,

> which she probably did not have to do. She said, 'Why don't you go see this person or this business?' And so I became the largest territory within our 17 territories, and I attribute that to that extra help that I received."

Meeting Members' Needs and Motivations by Providing Valuable Benefits.

Once association leaders know the needs and motivations of members, associations must provide benefits that address those needs and motivations (Ki & Wang, 2016). Numerous Chamber A leaders expressed the challenge of meeting the needs of members because they differ for every member. According to CAL4, "Something may be important to one member, but not important to another." CAL5 expressed that chamber members join for different reasons and then "We are trying to address all of those different reasons and engaging them in those different reasons can be challenging." Chamber A leaders agree that the chamber must provide value to members and if they provide that value, members will not only engage with the chamber but will renew their membership. CAL5 stated:

> "I think them seeing the value and the return on investment, that is the most important thing whether it be the engagement, the connection, the savings of money, the events and enjoying those types of events, and the information that we send from our emails that might be a value to them."

CAL6 agreed with this and stressed the importance of making the return on their investment known right away once they join. CAL6 stated, if that occurs, "They see the value and then they are going to stick around and participate."

Chamber A leaders and engaged members mentioned numerous benefits of the chamber that provided value which included: cost savings, connections/networking, visibility, varied and quality learning programs, community impact, flexible organizational approach, and informational resources. The researcher discussed each of these benefits separately, below, because Chamber leaders and/or engaged members mentioned their specific impact on member engagement.

Chamber A leaders prioritize providing cost savings because they serve as tangible benefits that support engagement and retention. As summarized previously, Chamber A offers various affinity programs designed to provide costs savings to chamber members. A review of past board meeting notes shows that Chamber A leaders consistently review various savings programs that they can provide to members. According to CAL5, members can save thousands of dollars alone by taking advantage of the energy and health care savings programs. CAL5 stated that “If members are seeing savings then they are going to keep engaging with the chamber.” CAL6 echoed this confidence by stating, “Those members using the benefits and saving are the ones that you really do not have to worry about. They will participate and keep coming back.” CAM1 and CAM3 agree that savings matter to their businesses and serve as a valuable benefit. CAM1 referred to the chamber’s professional development scholarship fund as a “no brainer that is free money” and essentially pays for his membership each year. CAM3 also expressed the value of chamber benefits that save him money. CAM3 takes advantage of the healthcare savings and energy savings, which he stated saves him thousands of dollars each year given the size of his business.

With regards to retention, CAM3 clearly stated that the main reason he renews each year is the savings that he receives by being a member. CAL6 and CAL6 also felt confident that members who financially benefitted from the chamber’s affinity program will continue to engage with those programs and will renew membership. Please note that only chamber members can take advantage of the healthcare and energy savings programs, and therefore, members must renew membership in order to continue receiving the savings.

Four of the five Chamber A engaged members who participated in interviews expressed the value of the connections/networking provided by the chamber. According to CAM1 the chamber is “the gift that keeps giving because it is just a great place to meet new people. I am always expanding my network through the chamber.” CAM2 also stated that “It is great for business networking opportunities,” but she has also found value in connecting with professionals who have been able to help her with personal needs. CAM3 echoed these sentiments and stated that a large part of why he participates in the chamber is because he needs the chamber “to grow my business and find other professionals I can do business with; the chamber is a great way to meet them.” Finally, CAM4 expressed that the connections that she has made in the chamber have been invaluable and enabled her to consistently exceed her sales goals. CAM4 also stated that chamber leaders take the time to connect her to new members at events, which has been very helpful. Comments made by CAL5 and CAL3 show that Chamber A leaders prioritize facilitating connections between members. According to CAL3, chamber leaders ask current members to “represent new members more-or-less at their first event so that they can be introduced around.” CAL5 also mentioned how she will directly connect members who have workforce challenges with members who specialize in that area, such as staffing companies and local school systems. The researcher observed this focus on connecting members when she observed a Chamber A leader making a concerted effort to introduce two members to each other at a networking event.

Chamber A leaders and members expressed that providing connections/networking is a best practice of the chamber and a main reason that members renew. When asked which chamber leader actions were the most effective for sustaining their commitment, CAM1 stated, “It is the connection, it’s the networking.” This was echoed by CAM2 who stated that the most effective action is “offering networking opportunities that meet my business needs.” CAL2 and CAL5 also agreed that the chamber’s focus on proving valuable connections/networking serves as a best practice. According to CAL5, “The networking is probably the best example because folks will say ‘I made this great contact, and I got a referral out of it,’ I mean that is an easy one.” With regards to retention, CAM1, CAM2, CAM3, and CAM4 all mentioned that they renew because of the excellent networking opportunities. CAM1 expressed this well when he stated that “I have made a lot of network connections there and therefore I am going to keep renewing.”

A value benefit closely related to providing connections/networking is providing visibility. Chamber A provides numerous opportunities to promote the visibility of its engaged members. Chamber A leaders repeatedly discussed the visibility benefits of sponsorship donors. According to CAL5, members appreciate the “visibility and exclusive email, the presence at the event, and being able to speak to a group for a minute about their product or their service.” CAL6 agreed when he concluded that “the extra visibility goes a long way, especially in events that have a high attendance. At the annual lunch for example, you can donate a basket that costs you $25 and there may be 50-60 entries in it.” In addition, CAL6 stated that Chamber A leaders prioritize providing exceptional visibility:

> “Your visibility will be very high. We let them know it is not just you pay once and then you hope it is going to go somewhere. We use tried and true standards that have been set by people and that is why you see at the big events that the same sponsors/donors come back every single year, because they have seen some benefit from it.”

Chamber A engaged members agreed that visibility is a significant benefit of them being engaged. CAM1 remarked that he donates to the chamber to “enhance my visibility within the chamber itself” and that he would not give to the chamber if the chamber did not provide him a certain level of visibility and tangible return. CAM1 also liked the fact that, as a volunteer, he receives visibility when Chamber A leaders ask him to speak about events which he volunteers for at chamber networking meetings; these brief speaking opportunities comprise “just another one of those little visibility pieces for my business.” CAM2 and CAM3 also expressed that they actively participate in the chamber for business exposure and promotion. CAM3 stated that he likes the fact that he does not have to “get out the checkbook, but I can donate something that is related to my business and get that self-promotion.”

CAM1 considered the visibility that he receives from the chamber a best practice. According to CAM1, chamber leaders impress him with their level of accommodation regarding the promotion of his business. CAM1 stated, “Once I do that [buy sponsorship] they are really great at making sure my logo is seen and they do a good job of talking about it at the events and stuff like that. I get great visibility.” CAL3 and CAL4 also agreed that the methods Chamber A uses to enhance member visibility is a best practice. Both leaders remarked that the chamber values the investment that members make in the chamber, and they strive to effectively promote those businesses. Using Chamber A’s annual golf outing as an example, CAL3 mentioned how their “company is also promoted for all to see with emails, newsletters, at the event itself, and their name and their company name is on the raffle board, etc.”

In addition to visibility being thought of as a best practice in Chamber A, visibility also impacts member retention according to chamber leaders and engaged members. CAL6 sees that members who actively donate and receive visibility are “those people that I do not have to worry about or their renewals. They are getting a benefit." CAM2 and CAM3 agreed that their active engagement results in exposure for their businesses that results in them renewing each year.

Another Chamber A benefit that provides value to members includes the varied and quality learning programs offered by the chamber. CAL3 remarked that Chamber A leaders prioritize finding the best speakers for programs because "it gets people out there. If it is somebody who people have heard of and they are great motivators, I think more people come to an event." A review of Chamber A board meeting notes showed that numerous discussions take place regarding needed programs and the best potential speakers. Numerous engaged members agreed that the varied and quality programming provided by Chamber A supports their engagement. According to CAM1, "The active and relevant programming that the chamber offers helps to build leaders. Not just the marketing, but the other ones too. They provide so many different options to learn." The desire to learn from respected speakers at Chamber A events leads to the participation of both CAM2 and CAM3. CAM2 stated that she oftentimes attends chamber events because "the subject is one that I'm really wanting to know more about, or I want to hear a new perspective from that expert." CAM3 also attends because he wants to learn more about the topic, but he also stated how impressed he is with the caliber of speakers that Chamber A can secure. CAM3 stated:

> "Bringing in that caliber of a regional person encourages me too because I want to go there. That is a good event, and it is great that the chamber is looking at going beyond just some HR things that you need to know about or some digital marketing stuff that you need to know about."

Both CAM1 and CAM3 consider Chamber A's programming a best practice that supports their engagement. CAM1 commented that Chamber A's programming "shows that they are not just collecting our memberships. They are actively trying to be relevant in the business community and the times." CAM3 agreed and stated that "The quality of the events or quality of the programs that are put together are important to me for staying involved and engaged." CAM3 also stated, "Where else am I going to go to get a roundtable discussion with all the mayors or with the Congressman's office? You know that is something I cannot go out and create on my own." Finally, CAM3 remarked that "having access to the chamber programs" is the number two reason that he renews his membership each year; "I have looked at other chambers and I was trying to get involved in some westside chambers about a year ago and this was just before COVID-19, and it was hard to find a chamber that does what this chamber does. The number of programs and the amount of communication and the number of events is awesome."

A benefit of Chamber A that is related to the educational programming is the flexible approach that chamber leaders and engaged members both value. Numerous board meeting notes show that leaders actively discuss providing programming at different times of the day and on different days of the week to accommodate members with different needs. Chamber A leaders augmented this flexible approach due to COVID-19 when they quickly adapted to providing Zoom networking meetings and programs. CAM2 greatly appreciated the flexibility of the chamber, as illustrated by her statement that "They offer events at different times and on different days of the week, which definitely helps to get me there." CAM1 felt that the chamber's adaptability and flexibility is a best practice because, whatever the challenge, "They do not panic, they just find a way to continue to provide us the programs that we need."

Chamber A also provides members the value of informational resources. While engaged members did not specifically mention the value of informational resources in their comments, both CAL3 and CAL5 think that the provision of those resources impacts member engagement and retention. CAL3 expressed that Chamber A always tries to provide members with information and resources that will help their businesses and that the chamber serves as a place where members can call and “they could ask us anything, any questions, and if we do not know the answer we will find the answer for them.” CAL5’s comments echo this vision of the chamber as a resource; she noted that the chamber leaders consistently look for and send out pertinent business-related information directly to members that will provide value. Examples of information that they provide include EPA information sent to manufacturers, Ohio Means Jobs information sent to members that have workforce development challenges, and, most recently, restaurant revitalization funding options through the SBA sent to member restaurants. CAL5 felt that this approach “increased our retention this past year with everything we did sending out all of the resources and information because members saw value in that information.” A review of board meeting minutes confirms that Chamber A leaders frequently discuss information and resources that they should share with specific members or the entire membership.

The previously discussed benefits that provide value to members pertain to what Bennett (2000) refers to as private incentives, which specifically benefit individual members. However, public incentives provide another value benefit to members that benefits the greater whole of the membership and/or community (Bennett, 2000). Four of five Chamber A engaged members specifically mentioned the role that community impact plays in their active engagement with the chamber. CAM2 enjoys being a part of the chamber because “It is a community organization that helps our community.” This sentiment was repeated by CAM3 who stated, “I want to be involved in the community. I want to help other business owners, and then help our partner organizations like schools and local governments." CAM5 is also very involved in Chamber A because:

> "I think it provides a lot of value to the county from an organizational perspective. It is important to us because it is helping with economic development and the vitality within the county definitely helps my organization. We want to see a nice community; we want it to be attractive. Attracting talent is not easy these days. So, if we are in an area that is attractive to people, it is a little bit easier to get those good employees."

CAM1 thought that Chamber A's "positive impact on the community through service" is a best practice that supports his engagement and renewals each year. CAM2 and CAM5 did not mention community impact as a best practice, but they too agreed that they renew membership in part because of the chamber's involvement and positive impact in the community. CAM5 stated that "The chamber's efforts to increase the vitality and attractiveness of Lake County is a win all the way around and therefore we renew to support the success of the chamber, the community, and small businesses."

The previous paragraphs in this section focused on the value that Chamber A's benefits provide to members and their impact on member engagement. One other subtheme that was mentioned that pertained to meeting member needs and motivations with valuable benefits was the importance of creativity. CAL5 felt that the use of creativity by Chamber A leaders was critical in securing engagement. This is best illustrated by CAL5's statement that "We have to be creative in order to keep people coming to events and to meet the needs of our members." CAL3 agreed by stating, "We cannot get set in our ways and not change because it is important to consider doing new suggestions so that you can keep things interesting." CAM3 has noticed Chamber A leaders desire to embrace creativity as he stated he was impressed with the leaders'

> "Continual effort of new and creative ways to address things. At times I have had a behind the scenes look at things and (Chamber A leader's) I do not want to say relentless, but continued pursuit of creative ideas is inspiring. It is a constant approach of what else could we be doing to engage members?"

CAL2 expressed that using creativity is a best practice at Chamber A because the use of creativity ensures that chamber programs attract the greatest amount of attention and attendance.

Welcoming and Community-Based Culture.

Many comments of both Chamber A leaders and engaged members pertained to the organizational culture of the chamber. The subthemes that immerged included the chamber's inclusive, open-minded, and welcoming environment; the leaders' display of positivity; and the encouragement of camaraderie, teamwork, and collaboration.

CAL1 discussed how she has been a member in a number of chambers and in other chambers she has become very frustrated by certain aspects of their cultures such as the encouragement to drink and the paternalistic structure. CAL1 stated:

> "That is a very old way of doing business and I think that new young female business owners are not going to do that. I do not have any of those negative feelings about this chamber. I feel like I am welcomed, and part of the group and I am not being singled out if I do not do one thing or another or for the fact that I am a woman. It is just one big group and community."

CAM1 is also a member of other chambers and he too felt that Chamber A's culture is one of "community building" and that the other chambers are not as "inclusive, diverse, and welcoming" as Chamber A. CAM4 echoed this sentiment when she talked about when she first joined the chamber and how they welcomed her and supported her beyond her expectations. CAM5 has noticed how chamber leaders provide that welcoming environment at events when they make a point of welcoming new members and making them feel comfortable. According to CAM5, Chamber A leaders "go and engage someone who is just standing around and make them feel comfortable." The researcher observed this approach during a direct observation at a networking event when a Chamber A leader welcomed a new member and proceeded to introduce the member to the entire group at the event. An open-minded attitude was also mentioned by two members (CAM2 and CAM3), who felt encouraged by that approach. CAM3 remarked how "There is very much an openness to listening to new ideas in the chamber…just being open to that. I do not have to hesitate to share something because if it is a good idea I will be told it is a good idea, and if it is something that just does not resonate with the others I do not feel belittled." CAM2 also felt that chamber leaders were always open to talking about new ideas and looking at new ways of doing things.

CAM3 considers the chambers leaders' inclusion approach a best practice. CAM3 stated that "I know that I can volunteer for anything, and I will feel part of the team. Like there is not going to be this anti-inclusion thing, and I know other members feel that way too because I hear it." CAL5 agreed that Chamber A's welcoming and inclusive approach is a best practice when she stated:

> "So I want to make sure I am doing my job as part of this too in welcoming people. You know you get new people at events and things like that, and I think our folks are just like

> that. They love it. I mean I love our group because somebody new comes in, and I do not know if it is the mentality of everybody, but I would like to think they are just very good people and that is why they are walking up because they just want to be welcoming. It is really nice."

The second subtheme visible in Chamber A, which describes and supports its culture, is the display of a positive mindset. CAM2 described Chamber A leaders as "very upbeat and positive," which she believes ensures the success of the chamber's events because people will attend more and make the chamber "worth everyone's time and money investment in the membership that we have committed to." CAM3 felt very strongly about positivity and stated that a negative presence in the chamber would directly impact his engagement in the chamber. CAM3 told a story about a negative member who "rubbed people the wrong way during some of his presentations at networking events given his negativity." However, according to his story, a Chamber A leader addressed the situation promptly because they are "very good about addressing problem issues like that which can have a negative impact on the chamber." Chamber A has experienced some recent negativity from a few members given the chamber's education of the members on updated COVID-19 protocols. CAM3 expressed gratitude for chamber leaders (mainly board members) who have "acted very quickly and very professionally" to address the negative messaging that has been sent to the chamber. CAL4 is convinced that having a positive mindset is a best practice for securing member engagement:

> "I think that we are contagious when any of us show passion and positivity and that we are really happy to be there and that we see value. And when they see that, it is contagious, it has a ripple effect. People want to be around that positive energy."

The final subtheme that applies to Chamber A's culture is the encouragement of camaraderie, teamwork, and collaboration. Both Chamber A members and engaged leaders remarked about how well those in the chamber work together for everyone involved. CAL3 stated that everyone "in the chamber itself is a great team that works together. We are pretty much on top of everything, and we all get along, which is very important. And I think people enjoy our events and being part of a team and community." CAL5 also expressed that chamber members feel like:

> "They are a part of it. They are a part of something. Again, it is that connection. I think of one of our major events and I think of the committee that we have had and some of the same folks have been on there for a while. They all have formed this wonderful group that connects with each other, and I try to do whatever I can to support that, and I think that's key to any of our committees. I see the camaraderie that they have, and it is wonderful."

CAM3 and CAM1 agreed that they like being part of a team and working with the various people on the two committees they sit on. With regards to member retention, CAL5 and CAL3 both thought that when members have that camaraderie and team connection with others in the chamber it impacts their desire to renew each year. When asked specifically whether various teamwork building engagement strategies impact retention CAL5 stated, "Absolutely yes. Yes, they feel connected to something. They have that camaraderie and the collaboration with other folks." CAM3 echoed that "people really enjoy being part of the team and it keeps them involved and staying as a member."

Strategic Planning.

A review of the collected data shows the importance of a mission statement and measurable goals at Chamber A. Chamber A currently has a strategic plan that sets the organization's goals for 2020 to 2022. The plan was developed at an annual board retreat that occurs in November each year. The strategic plan states the organization's mission and details three high level goals, accompanying objectives, and numerous strategies to accomplish those objectives. CAM5 currently sits on Chamber A's strategic planning committee, and she provided the researcher with an excellent summary of the organization of the strategic plan that provides extra details.

> "We have a one pager and then we have a longer plan that is numerous pages, which has our goals like grow membership and the engagement, growth, and retention piece of it. Then it includes our strategy and what metrics are tied to that and who is accountable for it. It is kind of a spreadsheet, and we can track some comments and then there is a status column. So it has been really good because I am a very visual person. So it is a good visual look that says these are all our strategies and how are we doing with them. We have got the status listed as red, yellow, green, and not started. So it has really enabled us to focus in on some specific areas and keep moving forward."

CAM5 also discussed how she recently attended a training on strategic planning with a chamber leader and that training provided her with the idea of creating a one-page strategic plan that displays Chamber A's mission, vision, and strategic pillars. Chamber A has never had a vision, but the committee is currently working on creating a vision. The committee is also presently shaping formally defined strategic pillars. According to CAM5:

> "We want something we can put forward to our members and say this is our plan, this is our vision 2023, our 2-3 year strategic plan. This is our mission, our vision, and our values. This is everything that we are working on for you."

A review of board meeting minutes and a direct observation showed that a strategic plan update takes place at each monthly board meeting. Chamber A board members and staff members report out updates and discuss the status of objectives at each meeting. CAL4 discussed the importance of staying on track with accomplishing the strategic plan and stated:

> "We need to stay focused and always have timelines and next steps because we could go on and on with ideas, but if we do not implement them we are nowhere. We have to have goals. We need to do something and not just talk about it."

One of the major goals of Chamber A's strategic plan is to "Grow Membership: Engagement, Growth and Retention." Objectives under this goal pertain to member attraction, retention, and engagement. Each objective lists numerous strategies that the chamber plans to use in order to accomplish the objective and ultimate goal.

In addition to having stated goals, Chamber A's strategic plan lays out a series of high-level metrics that help to measure whether chamber leaders accomplish the plan's strategies. The metrics include number of members, retention rate, event engagement/participation, website hits, Facebook followers, Instagram followers, Twitter followers, and Google metrics (impressions). CAM5 mentioned how chamber leaders discuss these metrics regularly at board meetings. The researcher also observed a chamber leader discussing these metrics at a marketing committee meeting; therefore, they are forefront in the mind of leaders as they work to accomplish the goals in the strategic plan.

CAM5, CAL4, and CAL1 all agreed that the strategic planning components of mission, measurable goals, and tracking is a best practice at Chamber A. According to CAM5, “Staying true to the mission and goals” of the chamber is critical. CAL4 agreed that written goals, timelines, and frequent updates ensure that the chamber does not “just talk about accomplishing things but actually does.” With regards to tracking, CAL1 remarked that “good chambers will track things, but most chambers don’t.” CAL1 concluded that the tracking of various metrics enables the chamber to effectively focus on and accomplish member engagement because they “know which strategies are working and which are not.”

Providing Support.

During the study’s interviews, Chamber A leaders and engaged members discussed the role that providing support plays in primarily engaging volunteers at the chamber in addition to donors. The subthemes that pertain to providing support that the researcher discovered in Chamber A included connecting skills with opportunities, offering training and guidelines, showing appreciation, using empowerment, and presenting awards/recognition.

Both Chamber A leaders and engaged members mentioned how each member has valuable skills and if they choose to volunteer for the chamber they must have the opportunity to use those skills. CAL1 remarked that she thinks members may not always know what to do when they first get on a committee or become more involved in the chamber but that “everyone has something to offer the chamber to support growth and chamber leaders need to understand what that is and play a role in connecting the member to it.” CAL4 viewed her marketing and advertising knowledge as a skill that the chamber can benefit from, and she expressed appreciation for the Chamber A leader who recognized her skills and asked her to chair the marketing committee. CAL6 discussed how he looks for skills that new members have when he completes a new member orientation with them and tries to get them involved in a committee or event that matches both their needs and their skill set. CAL6 specifically mentioned one situation involving a realtor.

> "I just had an onboarding today and she is a realtor and I said to her 'look the membership committee would be something great for you because you are not only helping the chamber by sharing your communication skills, but you are also networking with other individuals in the community.'"

From the member perspective, CAM1, CAM3, and CAM5 all enjoyed the fact that they could use their skill sets to benefit the chamber. CAM1 discussed his involvement with one of the chamber's largest events for a number of years and stated:

> "I really love the chamber events that bring in a lot of people. I schedule the music and coordinate all that for (Chamber A event) and that is a passion of mine. So I am able to combine a hobby and passion of mine along with the local economy and business and so that was a no brainer for me. (Chamber A leader) asked me to stay on and do the music stuff and so I did. You know this is my 5th or 6th year doing that, so it is something I am very passionate about."

A Chamber A leader also directly approached CAM3 and CAM5 regarding volunteer opportunities at the chamber that fit their skills. CAM3 had a skill set that benefited the chamber's scholarship committee and CAM5 was asked to actively participate in the chamber's strategic planning efforts given her planning role in her current job. With regards to member engagement best practices, CAM2 felt that chamber leaders "having an interest in her skills is very attractive" to her and she considers that attention a best practice. CAM2 also expressed that she likes "using different skills outside of the normal day-to-day tasks at work" and therefore her using those skills at Chamber A is a reason to renew membership.

The second theme of offering training and guidelines was mentioned by CAL1 and CAL3, yet the subtheme was not mentioned by any members. CAL1 thought that a way to support volunteers is to match them with a seasoned volunteer or board member who can essentially "show them the ropes." CAL1 stated that:

> "It is hard to say no to being matched up. But when you ask someone to be involved in a committee, we are talking about any kind of volunteerism, even if it is just helping out an event, you do not just ask them to help out at an event, you link them up with somebody and say, "Okay someone is going to be with you at that golf outing" so they know what to do."

CAL3 referred to specific training that Chamber A offers for volunteers to one of its largest annual events. For that event, Chamber A leaders include volunteers in a formal volunteer meeting. At that meeting Chamber A leaders give volunteers details about the roles that they perform at the event, and they also give volunteers badges and t-shirts. CAL3 thinks that these efforts support volunteers and encourage their retention.

The subtheme of providing support that Chamber A leaders and engaged members discussed the most pertained to leaders showing appreciation to member volunteers and donors, which all leaders felt was a best practice at the chamber. CAL2 stated, "I appreciate everything they are doing, and I let them know that." CAL4 also lets "volunteers know how important they are." In addition, CAL1 is "always considering how to best thank members" on her committee.

CAL5 makes a point to let volunteers know that the chamber only has 2.5 staff members and as a result the chamber simply “could not do what it is doing” without the support of volunteers. Formal appreciation from Chamber A leaders to volunteers and donors includes thank you letters with personal handwritten notes, a personal email, and/or a phone call. CAL5 strongly believes that that “personal thank you’s are important.” At times, Chamber A leaders also provide snacks and meals to volunteers to thank them for their help. Specifically regarding donations, CAM4 made the following statement when asked what challenges she may encounter with regards to making donations. Her statement shows the importance of a simple thank you.

> “This is hard because at this chamber you feel very appreciated when you give but there are other chambers, and I guess this tells you how important this is, that never acknowledge those donations. Not that I am looking for a pat on the back, I am just looking for a hey, I went out of my way a tiny bit to provide you something, is it not of value? That is what you start thinking, maybe this is not valuable. Then why am I doing this? This chamber has always been excellent. They always thank you and sometimes it is like embarrassing. It is like you do not have to keep thanking me anymore…I want to do this.”

CAM4 also remarked that showing appreciation is a best practice at the chamber because “everybody wants to be appreciated and I think if you go out of your way a good thank you is great.” With regards to showing appreciation and its impact of member retention, the general consensus of Chamber A leaders is that showing appreciation works because very little turnover occurs on many of the chamber committees. CAL4 expressed this well when she concluded that appreciation must have a positive effect “because those people are still on the committee, they are still involved.”

While Chamber A engaged members did not mention the topic of using empowerment as an engagement strategy, numerous chamber leaders think that empowerment is a critical piece to securing engagement. CAL4, CAL5, and CAL6 held the general consensus that empowering volunteers and encouraging their voices in decision-making has had a significant impact on engagement. According to CAL4, "respecting everyone's ideas and implementing them" makes members want to stay involved. When CAL6 first came to the chamber, this approach was something that he said he had to adjust to, but he now sees the value as illustrated in the following statement:

> "Oftentimes (Chamber A leader) will see that someone has not been talking much and she will ask them 'what are your thoughts on this?' Making people feel appreciated and empowered definitely goes a long way. I think if you are not going to listen to somebody, or they never talk, they are not going to do that anymore. So spotlighting and empowering volunteers goes a long way."

CAL6 considered the empowerment of chamber volunteers a best practice because their contribution strengthens Chamber A. According to CAL6, "hearing members' opinions gives you a different perspective. Everyone comes from different backgrounds, different types of businesses, different educations and ensuring that everyone's voice is heard goes a long way in strengthening the chamber." CAL5 also advocated empowering volunteers and "making them know and realize that they are the decision makers." CAL5 also stated that "it is more of embracing their ideas, their thoughts, and putting those in place and when people see that they themselves can have an impact on that committee and the chamber, they are engaged."

The final subtheme of providing support includes recognizing volunteers and donors and presenting awards to volunteers. Chamber A leaders and engaged members did not mention awards programs for volunteers but a review of documentation and archival documents found that the chamber presents one chamber volunteer with the Bright Star Award each year, which recognizes the significant value provided to the chamber by the volunteer. CAM1 and CAM3 both mentioned that providing recognition to volunteers and donors is a best practice in the chamber. Both members have noticed how Chamber A leaders have taken the opportunity to recognize the contribution of volunteers and donors in public forums, which they significantly appreciate. According to CAM1, “that extra recognition of mentioning volunteers at events really helps with visibility,” which, as discussed earlier, serves as a significant value benefit of the chamber.

Communication.

As previously mentioned, the theme of communication is the only theme that every Chamber A leader and engaged chamber member discussed during the interviews. Participants repeatedly discussed the importance of effective communication in member engagement and retention. The subthemes that the researcher discovered included providing consistent, clear, and frequent communication that communicates value; customizing messages; and the hosting of member orientations.

Numerous Chamber A leaders mentioned that a large part of their roles in the chamber involves communicating with the members. VAL4 expressed this well when she stated:

> “We have to consistently get the message out to current members about what we offer and let them know what their options are and the benefits that they can receive. Part of

> that messaging also includes addressing what is in it for them. What value will they find if they go to the event or attend that webinar or use that affinity program?"

CAL3's role at Chamber A includes designing the chambers emails and newsletters and she tries to ensure that she sends out clear information and makes it easy to find out more information. CAL3 stated that her use of click-to's that link to parts of Chamber A's website provides the opportunity for members to learn more about the information being shared. CAL1 agreed that communication needs to be clear and organized, stating, "I try to present it to them in a way that will be palatable and easy for them to understand." CAM4 greatly appreciated the frequent communication from Chamber A leaders, and she stated that "There is great communication from every single one of them just keeping you informed on what is going on." CAM2 liked the way that the chamber consistently communicated because she thinks "you kind of get into a groove with how an organization is going to communicate with you and then you rely on that." With regards to communicating value, CAM5 stated that "It is important to communicate what is available and also what benefit are gained if you take advantage of that. Sharing success stories that are obtained from utilizing the program is always helpful."

Chamber A leaders and engaged members repeatedly mentioned that communication from the chamber was a best practice for engaging members. Members consistently mentioned how Chamber A uses different channels to communicate including: social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube), emails, phone calls, text messaging, handwritten notes, and a website. CAM4 remarked that "the only way you can build a strong chamber is that your members have to know what is going on in order to participate." CAM4 concluded that because the chamber uses numerous different communication channels that helps to ensure member awareness of available offerings and benefits.

In addition to considering communication a best practice strategy for member engagement, engaged Chamber A members agreed that communication positively impacts member retention. CAM2 stated:

> "If the leaders did not make an effort for participation to be a priority that would affect me as a member for exposure, and just overall networking in general. So if it was not a priority to them to get participants, then that would affect me, and I would question whether I would still want to be a member."

CAM3 echoed this sentiment and discussed how some chambers in northern Ohio do not meet very often and do not have a lot of communication. If that were the case with Chamber A CAM3 stated that "there would be no value there and I would not renew."

The second subtheme of communication includes the use of customization including messaging segmentation and personal appeals. CAL5 and CAL4 extensively discussed the importance of segmenting information provided to members. CAL5 expressed that Chamber A will customize messages to different sectors (segmentation) in order to provide important information. For example, recently, Chamber A sent out information to all member restaurants regarding the SBA's Restaurant Revitalization program and Ohio EPA updates to member manufacturers. CAL4 expressed that Chamber A does a good job of sending segmented messages, but she is frustrated by the fact that, due to limited resources, the chamber cannot do more of that communication.

Chamber A leaders and engaged members also found personal appeals very effective in securing member engagement. Both CAL2 and CAL5 stated that directly contacting members is the best way to increase participation and secure both volunteers and donors. According to

CAL5, “It is a personal ask. We can put it in an email until we are blue in the face and sometimes we will get a couple of folks, but it is always a personal ask and I would say 95% of the time people are going to say yes.” CAL5 also stated that “just calling them and personally inviting them or having someone from the membership committee call them and personally invite them helps with member participation.” CAM1, CAM2, CAM3, and CAM4 all agreed that a personal ask is very effective. According to CAM1, “It is just that direct contact with them that probably impacted my decision the most to get more involved because maybe I would not be as involved in a lot of this stuff with the chamber if I did not hear from them personally.” CAM3 stated that he donates to chamber events “because I was asked to. If I am not asked, I will not donate.” Regarding volunteering, CAM4 was particularly impressed with how the chamber got her involved; she summarized how membership committee members personally visited her, summarized the value of volunteering in the chamber, and then asked her to participate. In CAM4’s words, their approach was “brilliant because they took their opening and they got right in. It was the ask and it was the way they showed me what it could do for me too and what I could get out of it.”

CAM1, CAM2, and CAM3 all considered personal appeals a best practice of the chamber, and which strengthened their level of involvement. Because Chamber A leaders have that “personal touch,” both CAM1 and CAM2 have both volunteered and donated. In addition, CAM3 stated that he has participated in numerous events because he received a personal phone call asking him to attend. CAL3 agreed that the chamber does an excellent job of “touching base personally and not just with an email. Sometimes the emails are impersonal. I think the personal touch and reach out is what helps keep members committed to the chamber and involved.”

The final subtheme of communication is a formal onboarding process for new members, which, at Chamber A, includes a set communication approach and either in-person or one-on-one onboarding meetings. Chamber A leaders believe that an onboarding process is critical to get new members engaged immediately because, according to CAL5, “the quicker we get them engaged, the more likely they are to renew their membership in that following year.” Plus, CAL6 stated that “if you build commitment in that first year, you are almost guaranteed a lifelong member.” A large part of CAL6’s role includes completing a comprehensive onboarding meeting with each new member during their first month of membership, and Chamber A leaders contact them again in the third and six month of membership as follow up. CAL6 stated:

> “When they join for the first time, we are meeting with them and letting them know all of the benefit cost savings, benefits, networking events, and all the different events that we offer throughout the year. So right away it can be sort of information overload at times, but we are making sure that they know everything that we are doing and that we understand them.”

During these one-on-one meetings, CAL6 also communicates the volunteer and donor opportunities at the chamber. Due to COVID-19, Chamber A has not recently hosted any in-person onboardings like in previous years, however chamber leaders stated that they will reinstate those and offer them to both new members and existing members later in 2021.

CAM3 and CAL6 considered onboardings a chamber best practice. CAM3 stated that he “would not have ever known about the chamber benefits if they did not cover them at the orientation for new members.” CAL6 agreed and called the member onboarding process the “most important part of a chamber’s member’s journey” because the process provides an opportunity for him to understand what the member is looking for out of the chamber and then allows him to directly connect chamber benefits to those needs.

Lack of Time and Resources.

The final theme discovered in this study was the lack of time and resources expressed by both Chamber A leaders and engaged members, which negatively impacts members' engagement. This theme included the subthemes of work and personal conflicts, and lack of organizational resources including working capital and staffing.

Every Chamber A engaged member and the majority of leaders mentioned how lack of time negatively impacts member engagement. CAL2 expressed that "A lot of it is just time. People are always struggling with where they are going to spend their time and I am a perfect example. I do that a lot. I want to go (to a chamber event) and then next thing you know you get tied up and you do not go." CAL4, CAL4, and CAL6 also remarked that lack of time significantly impacts their ability to engage members in volunteering. This is best summarized by CAL4's comment that "The challenge is the time element for a lot of people who are afraid to commit because they are afraid how many hours it is going to take." The engaged Chamber A member comments regarding time challenges all sounded very similar. CAM1 stated that he sometimes "just does not have the time to get to events," which is consistent with CAM3's comment that "as a small business owner having the time is a challenge."

The second subtheme of lack of organizational resources also negatively impacted member engagement. CAL1 remarked that:

> "There are businesses like mine where I am crunching numbers every single month trying to figure out how I am going to reinvest in my staff. How much am I going to invest in

equipment? How much am I going to do in marketing? And so when the chamber comes calling, there is not a lot left."

CAL6 agreed that lack of business resources is a reason some businesses do not invest more in the Chamber A. This is certainly the case with CAM2 who stated that sometimes she simply does not have the budget dollars to invest more in the chamber. CAL6 also stated that he wished he had more dollars to invest in member engagement efforts, but he has a "tight budget." In addition to lack of working capital, Chamber A also lacks the staffing level to accomplish certain activities. Both CAL5 and CAL6 discussed how Chamber A only has 2.5 employees, and as a result, they carefully determine where they spend their time. For example, sometimes they want to call every Chamber A member regarding certain opportunities, but they simply cannot accomplish that with their limited staffing resources.

Chamber B.

Strong, Trusting Relationships.

Comments from Chamber B leaders and engaged members pertained to five of the six subthemes of strong, trusting relationships included in this study: making personal connections, benevolence (showing caring behavior and commitment), responsiveness (listening and responding to needs), voluntary action (motivated to do more than required), and transparency (discussed within the theme of commitment).

CBL1, CBL2, CBL3, and CBL4 all mentioned the importance of connecting with members in order to support engagement. CBL4, who started his position during COVID-19, discussed how starting anew during the pandemic has been challenging, but he has taken every chance to build relationships with members. He stated that he tries to attend as many Chamber B

Zoom meetings and phone calls for committees so that he can “engage people in conversation, build that relationship and connection, and value their opinion.” CBL1 has found personally connecting with chamber members during COVID-19 very challenging because the events he attends are just “not as personal.” However, because Chamber B is back to providing in-person events, he is grateful to have that face-to-face interaction which he thinks is “critical for building relationships with members,” CBL3 praised Chamber B’s President and CEO approach to connecting with members when she stated:

> “He has such a personable and people friendly manner. I mean when I first came to the chamber, I met with him, and I felt like I always knew him. So I really feel it is that type of a person that has that type of personality, that type of approach where people just connect with who you are. Who you are is who you are, and they trust you.”

CBM1 and CBM2 both felt like they had developed strong friendships and relationships with leaders in the chamber, which supported their engagement. CBM1 expressed that those friendships and relationships “makes you want to keep going. I think eventually once you get to a lot of chamber events, they know who you are, and you meet more people easily, and it becomes natural.” CBM2 echoed that “it is all based on friendships. You build these friendships and relationships, and you rely on people and before the pandemic you really liked seeing them and you would look forward to the next event.”

Numerous Chamber B leaders and members considered personal connections with members in the chamber a best practice that supports member engagement. CBL1 discussed how Chamber B is a “relationship chamber” and leaders focus on taking the time to get to know members and “constantly work on that connection.” Members recognize the result of that work and praise Chamber B leaders. CBL1 stated that the leaders are “constantly engaged and reaching out” to him. In addition, he appreciated the fact that they have “made the time to get to know” him. CBM5 also had the same experience with Chamber B leaders, and she considered that personal relationship a significant benefit. CBM3 best summarized the importance of personal connections in the chamber with this statement:

> “The personal aspect of the chamber amazes me. It amazes me that a large chamber such as (Chamber B), especially over the last year, is still so personal. (Chamber B leader) saw me yesterday and he immediately knew me and introduced me to some people, which was so helpful to me, and that personal aspect is a huge driver. No matter how you participate, or when you participate, you are looked at as the same person who maybe does everything. Giving you that feeling is very important. It makes you feel like your membership is worth having.”

Chamber B leaders and members mentioned numerous comments that pertained to the subtheme of benevolence, or care and commitment to members. In each of the cases, the comments were in response to a question that asked which leaders strategies were most effective; this highlights that this subtheme is a significant best practice of Chamber B. CBL2 explained the commitment that Chamber B leaders have to members; they are “willing to help and they about businesses.” Plus, the leaders want members to feel comfortable so that they openly approach them with their needs. Numerous Chamber B members (CBM1, CBM4, and CBM5) all recognized and referenced the leaders’ caring approach. CBM1 summarized their caring approach well when he stated:

> "I would say their ability to understand what is going on with us, that empathy and compassion. They get what is going on with us and I think that caring nature that they have means a lot. We are not another number. They know us on a first name basis. You know what I mean? So it is getting back to that personable relationship. That is the experience we have had."

CBM1 also felt that Chamber B leaders' caring approach supports his decision to renew each year because they care about what his business needs.

The third subtheme of listening and responding to needs was prevalent in the question responses from Chamber B leaders (CBL3, CBL4, and CBL5) and engaged members (CBM1, CBM2, and CBM5). All of the Chamber B leaders and engaged members felt that this subtheme was a best practice of chamber leaders. Please note that the researcher more thoroughly addresses responding to needs under the next section. The perspective of Chamber B leaders is that this is one of their main roles; in order to effectively serve their members, they must ask questions, listen to the answers, and then act. CBL3 stated that "in our conversations I feel like we are always listening, we are taking a temperature check and listening to the other members and what they are interested in." CBL4 also stated, "It is about asking a lot of questions and I am asking what are you looking to get out of the chamber? What do you need?" CBL5 referred to a three-part process that he uses at the chamber that involves "listening, surveying, and assessing." The engaged member perspective on the listening approach of Chamber B leaders is best summarized by CBM5's comment that "They listen to what I need, and they try to help me grow my business."

Chamber B leaders listen to members by providing numerous feedback opportunities in formal surveys and emails, but also in casual conversations and phone calls. Due to COVID-19 complications, Chamber B completed numerous surveys last year to ensure that the chamber was effectively listening to members. CBL2 specifically mentioned how she handled listening to feedback at Chamber B's recent job fair. CBL2 summarized how she used a formal survey to gain feedback from attendees, but she also spoke to numerous members at the event to get their input and followed up by email with some members after the event. The researcher observed a board meeting during which the board members discussed the job fair's survey results. According to CBL2, the best feedback includes that which members give either in person or on the telephone because she then immediately asks follow-up questions of the members, which can assist with the chamber's responsiveness to the feedback.

The final subtheme of strong, trusting relationships present at Chamber B includes the use of voluntary action. As stated previously in the within-case analysis for Chamber A, Crane (2018) considers voluntary action to include unrequired or nonobligatory actions. CBL2 clearly displays this approach given her following statement:

> "I would say that I am always available to members. I answer my emails as fast and I can, and I try to be as accessible as I can. I have given out my personal cell to members and they have contacted me after hours, because I am here for them."

CBL3 discussed the actions that two Chamber B leaders took during COVID-19, which, according to her, showed voluntary action. CBL3 summarized how the chamber experienced funding issues at the beginning of the pandemic prior to receiving Payroll Protection Program (PPP) dollars. CBL3 stated that the two chamber leaders:

> "Stepped up to the plate and said we are not going to work full time in order to help the chamber. That probably was not necessary, but they put as much value into their work that they did while they were there because they wanted to be cost effective and save money for the chamber. To me that speaks volumes about their commitment to the businesses in our community."

CBM4 also told a story about how Chamber B leaders assisted the business with being eligible for a large sustainability grant that would benefit the member's business. CBM4 specifically stated, "They did not have to do if for me because I suppose it was out of their normal course of business, but they did help which I really appreciated." CBM5 remarked that Chamber B leaders "will do whatever it takes to help my business" even if the action requires that they go out of their way to make that happen. According to CBM5, this approach effectively secured her commitment to the Chamber B thus making voluntary action a best practice.

Meeting Members' Needs and Motivations by Providing Valuable Benefits.

As discussed in the previous section, Chamber B leaders prioritize listening to members, which enables them to provide benefits that effectively address the needs and motivations of members (Ki & Wang, 2016). All Chamber B leaders expressed the importance of the chamber providing value to members via benefits that they cannot receive elsewhere. CBL5 summarized this position by stating, "Members engage in the chamber because they perceive that they get value from the chamber, or we have their back, or that we are providing something that is a value to them that they are not likely to get elsewhere." However, CBL3 expressed that providing value to all chamber members is a challenge because value "means different things to different businesses." Despite the challenge, CBL5 is convinced that providing a clear value proposition "allows folks to be committed to the chamber because they understand the value proposition and then it certainly has an effect on member retention."

In order to address varying business needs, Chamber B provides value by offering numerous benefits including cost savings, connection/networking, visibility, varied and quality learning programs, community impact, flexible organizational approach, and informational resources. The researcher discusses these value benefits and their connection to member engagement below.

As mentioned in the description of Chamber B, the chamber offers numerous affinity programs that assist members in saving money. CBL4 stated that the affinity programs serve as a main selling point for Chamber B, and he has found that members engage with the chamber for the sole reason of taking advantage of some of those cost savings programs. For example, he discussed how he can complete a quick audit of a business' utility bills and determine how much they will save if they use Chamber B's energy program. By offering this benefit, he stated that member businesses have saved hundreds of dollars. While CBM4 does not take advantage of the energy program benefits, she does benefit from the Office Depot discounts available through the chamber. CBM4 stated, "Those savings can really add up quickly to pay for your membership for the year. So the benefits like that through the chamber are excellent and I will keep using them." CBM5 also mentioned the chamber's partnership with Aflac that offers a 50% discount on Aflac products; this benefit can provide thousands of dollars in savings to chamber members. CBM5 expressed that any "extra cost savings that the chamber can offer provides one more reason to become engaged with the chamber."

Not surprisingly, all of the members who participated in interviews discussed the importance of Chamber B offering valuable connections/networking. CBM3 stated:

> “You are involved in a chamber so that you are able to network with other businesses in the chamber, that is why you participate. That is the number one reason to be involved in a chamber, to interact with other businesses so you know who is in the community and they know who you are.”

CBM5 expressed that the “networking is priceless” at Chamber B; CBM1 agreed and remarked that he has received a lot of business by connecting with other members at events. Chamber B leaders recognize that this is a primary role of the chamber. According to CBL3, a main role of the chamber is to “offer places where businesses are able to connect with other businesses” and she considers this benefit as a best practice of the chamber because “an incredible amount of connections and collaborations begin at chamber events and meetings. I have seen it with my own eyes.”

Three engaged Chamber B members mentioned the role that Chamber B connections/networking plays in their decision to renew membership. CBM1 concluded that he will continue to renew his membership because “going to a chamber event is always good. It is always good meeting someone new and putting them in your network is always a benefit. So it is always good to be part of the chamber.” CBM5 agreed that she will continue to renew because the chamber gives her the opportunity to “get face-to-face with top officials of local companies.” Finally, CBM3 shared the same opinion and stated, “The renewal of membership with (Chamber B) is very important because of the community itself. The fact that I can network. I have the ability to network with all of these businesses, so they realize who I am.”

In addition to facilitating connections/networking, Chamber B also provides value to its members by increasing their visibility. Chamber B provides numerous opportunities to promote the visibility of its engaged members. Each of the five Chamber B leaders discussed the success of the chamber's ribbon cuttings and spotlights that promote participant visibility. The ribbon cuttings are events that the chamber hosts at the locations of new members that open a business in the community. Spotlights then focus on existing members and include a chamber leader visiting the member business, completing a recorded video, taking pictures, and then promoting that spotlight using numerous social media channels. According to CBL2, these Chamber B offerings "focus on sharing member stories and gaining as much visibility and brand recognition with the chamber for them and the community." Chamber B members also mentioned the excellent visibility that they receive when they participate, donate, and volunteer for the chamber. CBM1, CBM3, and CBM4 all stated that they donate to the chamber because they want the visibility and the awareness that those donations bring. Those members also participate in chamber events because of the opportunity to make their businesses more visible. Specifically regarding volunteers, CBM5 volunteers because she wants her business' name on the "top of people's minds" and volunteering for the chamber helps to accomplish that goal.

CMB1, CBL2, and CBL5 all expressed that the chambers' efforts to maximize member visibility is a best practice. CBM1 stated that the most effective leader strategies in the chamber include those that "provide us the visibility, the promotion of our hotel and being top of mind. It helps us be successful and brings in revenue and meet our goals." CBL2 agreed and concluded that "having as much branded content as possible is critical because people love to see their logo everywhere, on social media, and at the events etc." Every Chamber B member also expressed that the visibility that they receive from the chamber impacts their decision to renew. The consensus between all of the member comments on this topic is that Chamber B helps their members stand out in the chamber and the community and, therefore, renewing membership is a good investment.

The varied and quality learning programs offered by Chamber B also provide value to members. Surprisingly, none of the Chamber B leaders discussed the variety and quality of chamber programs, but all engaged members remarked about the excellent programming. CBM2 was particularly enthusiastic about the chambers programming when he stated, “I think their programming is just excellent. Excellent! I cannot stress that enough. I take advantage of it because it adds a lot of value to me. And I hope that other businesses feel that way.” Other businesses do feel that way, as expressed by CBM3 who stated that “They put together a number of events that you feel are worthwhile and that are meaningful and educational.” CBM4 also discussed her participation in a young professionals group at the chamber that was very active prior to the pandemic, which she found very valuable because “We were learning about other businesses. We were hearing from other entrepreneurs. Our minds were being challenged and we were asking questions and getting answers that could help our own businesses.”

Both CBM2 and CBM3 expressed that the chambers programming serves as a best practice and a reason to renew membership. CBM2 discussed the numerous programs that the chamber held during the pandemic that were designed to keep members up-to-date on the rapidly changing government support programs; “There were weekly programs and those to me were invaluable. They always give a lot of up-to-date information, and it is very high-level content and quality. I just felt each one was worth my time and therefore I will keep attending.” CBM3 agreed that you can count on the chamber having “a speaker who has relevant information to share.” CBM3 also stated that he would continue to renew because those events are “effective and meaningful, so that is why I want to continue to be part of the chamber.”

A benefit of Chamber B related to the programming includes the flexible approach that chamber leaders take when they schedule programs. CBL3 explained that the chamber holds at least three or four different events every month, which they offer at different times and on different days of the week to accommodate the needs of different businesses. CBL3 stated that “We are just trying to be accommodating to the member wants and needs.” Numerous board meeting notes confirm that the Chamber B leaders make this a priority. CBL5 also discussed how Chamber B started a new committee before COVID-19 called the Member Visit Committee, which was tasked with visiting members to “check in” and also get updated contact information from the members for the chamber’s database. CBL5 stated that this provided a great opportunity for engaged member businesses who normally did not have the flexibility to attend regular committee events. They could help the chamber and their own businesses by visiting other member businesses when the visits worked for their schedules. While these visits stopped due to COVID-19, CBL5 stated that they will start up again later in the summer given the visits’ success.

Another action that Chamber B leaders have taken which pertains to offering flexibility to members is the introduction of a tiered dues structure in 2020. CBL5 explained that chamber leaders introduced this new dues model in order to offer members the ability “to invest at the chamber based on what value we bring to you, or potential value, and to essentially provide personalized benefits based on member needs.” The lowest membership price is $250, which comprises the base membership. In addition to that membership, members have the ability to invest at four other levels: Business Investor ($500), Corporate Investor ($1,000 or $1,250), Key

Investor ($2,500), and Civic Investor ($4,000). As members invest more, the tiered dues structure gives them the flexibility to choose additional benefits with that investment based on their needs. For example, a Key Investor receives the benefit of receiving priority placement on advertisements and social media posts in addition to the $2,500 in investor dollars, which the member can use to purchase a number of different a la carte benefits. CBL5 stated:

> "If you invest at the corporate level or higher, you have complete freedom within our sandbox to spend your investment how you value it the most and we provide many different options for spending that investment: golf outing tickets, paid emails advertisements, paid social media posts, live raffle pulls at events and more."

According to CBL5 the tiered dues structure is "the most effective thing" that the chamber has done in his tenure with the organization because the new structure has not only increased revenue, but it has further engaged members because they get better value out of their membership.

A further Chamber B benefit that provides value to members includes informational resources. Both CBL2 and CBL5 felt that the chamber had always been an informational resource, but that specific role increased as a result of COVID-19. CBL2 stressed that:

> "Normally we are really making people feel like there is somewhere to turn, like when they run into an issue that they need information on, we are that place. Sometimes they do not know where to go. We especially found that a lot with COVID-19 restrictions, loans, and things that were more high level; there was information it seemed like everywhere but where do you go to get it and trust it? So being able to consolidate

> resources and be a go to resource hub for people to know that they were getting good information was critical."

CBM2 agreed that Chamber B was invaluable during the pandemic when the chamber provided excellent information that members could reply upon; "There was all this money flowing back and forth and some people were getting it, some people were not, so it was confusing for people. I think that they did an excellent job of walking people through it." CBM2 also stated that outside of the pandemic period, Chamber B has always been seen as a resource to local businesses that keeps businesses in the community. According to CBM2:

> "If you ignore a business or do not help a business or if they do not feel that this is a hospitable or helpful place for them, they are going to relocate eventually. You do not want that. You want them to feel like this is home, like this is a place that is helping them succeed by helping them with resources."

In addition to the private incentives that have already discussed in this section, Chamber B also provides public incentives that benefit the greater whole of the membership and community. Two engaged Chamber B members spoke extensively about the impact that the chamber provides in the community and the fact that that impact strengthens their engagement and commitment to renewing. When asked why she is committed to the chamber, CBM4 stated:

> "Well, I am a collaborative human. I believe that there is strength in numbers and there is power in people and what they bring to the table. So, what I can achieve on my own is one thing, what you and I can achieve together is actually more than you and I could achieve separately. And so that is the idea of a chamber and the strength of its power in a community; I believe in it and its core. I am devoted to that concept of what it is and

> being here in a really great suburb I know that if I am going to be part of our chamber, there is simply just going to be an awful lot of other business owners and we may not agree an awful lot of things in, like in who we are as people, but at its essence we are going to believe in this city and wanting our businesses to be strong and this being an attractive place to do business and to live."

CBM2 considered Chamber B a:

> "Lifeline to the business community that is a critical in helping to support about 30,000 jobs in the community and each one is important because what you are doing is you are supporting a family. You are giving someone an opportunity to buy a house. You are giving someone the opportunity to send their kids to school. You are giving someone an opportunity to pay a mortgage. And then giving someone an opportunity to get skills in life and then maybe advancements in their careers. That is so critical and key. That is great communities when you are able to do that for your workforce. And think about it, we have 900 companies, and they are doing that and half of them are members of the chamber which is helping them be successful."

The second subtheme that the researcher discovered at Chamber B that pertained to meeting member needs included the use of creativity. CBL2 and CBL5 both mentioned the importance of creatively meeting the needs of members. CBM3 and CBM5 confirmed the value of creative approaches to their businesses, and they consider those a best practice of Chamber B. CBM5 remarked that:

> "(Chamber B leader) can think out of the box very easily. He is always like, what if we do this and what if we do that? And it is not all about him in the chamber. It is about

helping the members of the chamber, at least he has done that with me. He has a very strong ability to think outside the box to get done what needs to get done. That approach has been invaluable to me."

This viewpoint was echoed by CBM3 who stated:

"I am trying to think of the best way to put it…to go outside of the box. To not do the norm. The chamber excelled at that in 2020. So to not just sit on your hands and freak out but to keep moving forward and to be open to new directions. The chamber definitely does that."

Welcoming and Community-Based Culture.

Many comments of both Chamber B leaders and engaged members pertained to the organizational culture of the chamber. The prevalent subthemes in the data included the chamber's inclusive, open-minded, and welcoming environment; the leaders' display of positivity; and the encouragement of camaraderie, teamwork, and collaboration.

All of Chamber B's engaged members referenced the welcoming and open environment at the chamber, which makes them feel comfortable attending and participating in events. CBM3 provided an excellent description of what he has encountered at Chamber B events:

"At meetings I have attended, folks are always welcoming, and I see that as well with the leadership of the president and assistant. Walking in you are always made to feel welcome. They may even grab you by the arm and walk you around the room and introduce you to a number of people."

CBM1 and CBM5 have also felt welcomed at meetings. CBM1 remarked that Chamber B has a "casual feel with warm welcoming people" and CBM5 agreed stating that "it is business-like, yet warm and welcoming." According to CBM1, he based part of his decision to renew on the fact that he likes the comfortable environment. The additional concepts of inclusion and openness were introduced by CBM2 in the following statement:

> "This chamber is very open. I think it is becoming a lot more diverse. (Chamber B) is very diverse. I think it is finally starting to represent that diversity in (Chamber B community), and I think that is just absolutely wonderful. So if you are a minority, or you are a woman, or say you are an Indian-owned business, you feel more comfortable now. It is not like it was maybe 20 or 25 years ago; you would have felt like you are alone. And I just think diversity, equity and inclusion is who the chamber is now. I think that is what they represent, and I think you could feel it with just more diversity in their membership. And I think it is one of the greatest strengths of (Chamber B community) and it is also one of the greatest strengths of the chamber. Because if you set that tone, then everyone is going to feel that sort of welcoming. And the opposite, if you do not you will be on the losing end of the future of a community."

CBL5, CBL3, CBM3 and CBM1 also referenced the openness visible in Chamber B. Their comments stressed that, by being open-minded, the chamber creates an environment that is comfortable for all members and one within which people want to spend time.

CBL3 and CBM3 also mentioned the importance of the positive environment at the chamber. CBM3 felt that the positive attitude of chamber leaders was a best practice at the chamber because that attitude played a large role in his continued commitment. CBL3 specifically referenced that chamber leaders have actively discussed how to create an "atmosphere of positivity and moving forward." CBM3 concluded that that approach is necessary in order for members to be excited about participating and investing time and money in Chamber B.

The final subtheme that applies to Chamber B's culture is the encouragement of camaraderie, teamwork, and collaboration. Numerous Chamber B leaders and engaged members mentioned these three concepts in their comments. Their comments described a group of people that embrace the fact that they are on one team that works to strengthen the businesses in the community and that, if they fail to collaborate, they will miss out on many opportunities. According to CBL2, "people truly feel like they are part of a community and team in the chamber, and they are working towards accomplishing a mission." CBM5 certainly felt that as she stated, "When you are there, you are all on the same team. There is definitely camaraderie." CBM2 also felt part of the team; "We are part of the team. We do everything for the team and there is nothing that we will not do for the chamber. Everyone is like whatever you need and that is just the way we roll." CBL1 and CBL3 expressed that members who feel camaraderie with others in the chamber and who feel part of a team continue to renew their memberships because they enjoy that feeling of community and connectedness; therefore, leaders must encourage and support that team approach and camaraderie.

Strategic Planning.

The mission, vision, and measurable goals of Chamber B serve as a strong foundation for member engagement in the chamber. Chamber B has a strategic plan that outlines the organization's goals for 2020–2024. The board developed the most current plan at a retreat prior to the start of the pandemic. The strategic plan states Chamber B's mission and vision statements, three high level/strategic goals, accompanying objectives, and numerous strategies to accomplish those objectives. One of Chamber B's main strategic goals includes Membership Growth, Engagement & Retention. Accompanying strategies include items such as visibility opportunities for members, surveys of members, member visits, personalized communications, and other initiatives. The plan also lists deadlines, responsible parties, status, and notes for each strategy. Chamber B leaders color-coded the status of strategies as either green (accomplished and/or strong activity), yellow (on track), or red (not started or slow progress), and Chamber B leaders update the color-coding status and notes monthly. Board meeting notes show that the board discusses strategic plan updates and key metrics at each board meeting in order to ensure implementation of the plan. The researcher also observed strategic plan updates during a board meeting.

Chamber B's strategic plan also has an extensive series of metrics designed to measure the accomplishment of membership, financial, program, governance, and marketing & communication objectives. CBL5 tracks these metrics using a key performance indicator (KPI) dashboard, which Chamber B leaders discuss at each board meeting. CBL5 expressed, when he first came to the chamber, his largest challenge included trying to measure success at the chamber, and he considered measurement of member engagement as part of that success. For two years, he worked on developing a detailed member database and measurement system that now tracks 14 member engagement metrics. CBL5 stated that the chamber must measure more than just event and program attendance, to which many chambers limit themselves. CBL5 stressed the importance of having a "complete engagement profile" for members because the chamber "needs to make sure that it is measuring commitment across the areas that are important to members and those areas differ by member." The metrics that the chamber tracks pertain to number of onboarded new members, post-onboard communications (1-month, 3-month, and 9-month), member retention, members participating in affinity programs, program attendance, social media/web impressions, social media followers, completed spotlights, newsletter/communications open and click-through rates, volunteer counts and activity, and paid member advertising/sponsorships. Chamber B leaders use this detailed engagement management tracking system to rank members each year according to engagement. Chamber B leaders organize the ranking using a color-coded system: green symbolizes high engagement, yellow symbolizes average engagement, and red symbolizes low/at risk engagement. According to CBL5, the key to increasing member engagement includes:

> "Data, data, data. We needed to figure out what to put in our database so that we could generate a report that says here are our least engaged and here are our most engaged and you go from there. It is worth investing that time and effort on the least engaged and the ones that are decreasing because it is always easier to keep a member than to get a new member."

Once the Chamber B leaders complete the rankings, they strategically reach out to lesser engaged members in order to encourage further engagement and to meet their needs.

Both CBL3 and CBL5 consider the chamber's approach to strategic planning and tracking a best practice that has a positive impact on member retention. They consider their process a best practice because the process has enabled all chamber leaders to focus on goals that will successfully impact member engagement. Chamber B's methodical approach to tracking engagement has allowed chamber leaders to identify at risk members and then work on building their engagement. Chamber B has seen decreased attrition since chamber leaders began a more concerted effort to reach out to members based on the collected engagement data.

Providing Support.

Chamber B leaders and engaged members remarked that support provided by chamber leaders assists in engaging both volunteers and donors. The subthemes that pertain to providing support that the researcher discovered in Chamber B included connecting skills with opportunities, offering guidelines, showing appreciation, using empowerment, and presenting awards/recognition.

While Chamber B engaged members did not discuss using their specific skill sets to benefit the chamber, both CBL4 and CBL5 remarked that all members have skills that leaders could use to assist the chamber and part of their role includes making those connections. CBL4 discussed how he carefully listens to new members' interests and any statements that they make about their skills during onboarding sessions; he then has the goal of connecting them to a committee that could use those skills. CBL4 mentioned how he recently met with a new member who used to plan golf outings for her prior company; therefore, during that meeting he suggested that she get involved with Chamber B's golf outing committee. CBL4 considered that a "perfect fit that worked for the member and the chamber." CBL5 confirmed that he takes a similar approach and summarized what he tells a member:

> "I do a lot of listening and learning about what the business or new member does. Then I say that 'if you would like to get more involved based on your skills sets or personality, there is something that might overlay with our needs. So basically you are doing what you love on a committee.'"

By taking this approach, Chamber B leaders have been successful in engaging members in volunteer activities that benefit the chamber and help the chamber meet its goals.

With regards to volunteer training, Chamber B does not provide any formal training; however, chamber leaders have developed what they call “volunteer descriptions,” which describe specific/tasks that volunteers take responsibility for completing at certain events. This approach enables volunteers to fully understand their accountability at the event. CBL5 also mentioned that he has created “job descriptions” for each committee, which provide significant committee details and responsibilities to committee members and potential members. A review of chamber documentation found that a committee “job description” includes a purpose statement, committee composition details, summary of desired volunteer qualifications, time commitment expectations, and scope of authority details. For example, the membership committee has the purpose of providing insight on member recruitment, engagement, and retention. The committee includes a chair, vice-chair, and six to eight members currently in good standing who can volunteer approximately three hours each month. The committee members’ scope of authority includes working collaboratively with staff members to develop and implement member recruitment, engagement, and retention initiatives. CBL5 stated that having the “job descriptions” has assisted him with successfully recruiting and retaining committee members.

The third subtheme of providing support in Chamber B pertained to chamber leaders showing appreciation. CBL2 remarked that chamber leaders prioritize thanking chamber volunteers and donors for their support of the chamber. CBL2 not only thanks members in person and in writing, but she also “gives a shout out” to volunteers and donors in social media posts. Chamber B engaged members have taken notice of the efforts to thank them for their support as illustrated by CBM3's comment that he always "receives a positive reaction and appreciation from the chamber" when he has donated. With regards to thanking volunteers, CBM4 expressed that she always felt appreciated when she volunteered time towards Chamber B.

The subtheme of empowerment was also evident in Chamber B's approach of supporting volunteers. As previously discussed, Chamber B leaders have clearly outlined the responsibilities of committee volunteers in the committee job descriptions. Those job descriptions show that Chamber B leaders empower committee members with decision-making and implementation abilities. CBL3 remarked that she works collaboratively with other chamber leaders to implement feedback that members on the programming committee have suggested. CBL3 stressed the importance of listening to members on the committee and implementing their feedback which supports their continued engagement in the committee's work.

Lastly, Chamber B leaders prior to COVID-19 did present a volunteer of the year award and a Bright Star award to engaged members who gave of their time and talents to the chamber. The review of Chamber B archives and documentation showed that the volunteers presented with these awards received significant recognition in chamber newsletters, at events, and on the chamber's social media sites.

Communication.

As in Chamber A, the theme of communication is the only theme that every Chamber B leader and engaged member discussed during interviews. Their comments collectively stressed the importance of effective communication for member engagement and retention. In addition, each of them felt that communication was a best practice of Chamber B. The subthemes of communication that the researcher discovered in Chamber B included providing consistent, clear, and frequent communication that conveys value; customizing messages; and hosting member orientations.

Chamber B leaders remarked that they must prioritize actively communicating with members and make the value of the chamber known. CBL1 stated that “We just have to make sure that members are aware of the availability of events and benefits and the value that those opportunities provide.” CBL2’s comments echo those sentiments; “We are communicating what is available, what it costs, when it is available until, and what it offers our members.” Engaged members appreciate detailed communication as illustrated by CBM2, who stated that he wanted to know “What are the benefits? What do I get out of it? You have got to be in it for something, right?”

When designing Chamber B communications, CBL2 stated that she recognizes the importance of consistency and frequency, so she has a schedule that outlines when she promotes events (a two-week-out post, a one-week-out post, and a last call to register). The approach has a positive impact on members, as illustrated by CBM5’s comment that:

> “If I only heard from the chamber once a month it would not pique my interest as much as the constant communication that they have. Do I take part in everything they offer? No, but I like to see what is going on and they have every form of communication that you would want. I do not want to say they are in your face, because that kind of has a negative connotation, but you can always know what is going on at the chamber because of their excellent communication.”

In addition, CBL2 expressed the importance of distributing clear communications that do not get lost in people's inboxes, so she uses bolding, bright colors, eye-catching headlines/subject lines and hyperlinks that take members to additional information should they have interest in learning more. Chamber B engaged members recognized the strong communication efforts of chamber leaders as illustrated by CBM4's comment that:

> "I do think the chamber is very good at outreach in general. So I do think that the chamber leaders are trying on a weekly basis to engage the members. They are very communicative. Their newsletter is consistent, and it is full of things that I could engage in. The only thing that they could do more than what they do is literally show up to my door and knock on it and say, 'Hey, this is happening this week sign up,' which they more-or-less almost do with you to a point. So they are very proactive, and we hear from them a lot. We see the things they are offering, and they send reminders. They are good at that outreach."

As previously stated, all Chamber B leaders and engaged members felt that the chamber's approach to communication is a best practice. Both Chamber B leaders and engaged members discussed the variety of channels that the chamber uses to communicate, which include social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube), emails (including newsletters), phone calls, handwritten notes, announcements at events, and a website. CBL2 remarked that "We are trying to find everybody where they are, whether it is social, whether it is email, whether it is a phone call." Specifically regarding social media, both CBL2 and CBL5 considered Chamber B's social media accounts a best practice that has enabled the chamber to strengthen their engagement with members.

In addition to being a best practice, CBL2 and CBM3 felt that the chamber's communication efforts positively impacted member engagement. CBL2 expressed that effective communication from the chamber ensures that people attend events and take advantage of benefits. If members do both of those, then they see the value of the chamber and will continue to renew. CBM3 agreed with this rationale and commented that effective communication impacts his engagement in their offerings and his membership renewal each year.

The second subtheme of communication present in Chamber B is customization, which includes the use of messaging segmentation and personal appeals. Chamber B does not extensively use messaging segmentation because CBL2 explained that the chamber tries to share information that is relevant across business sizes and industries. However, Chamber B does segment communications to industries if an important update applies to them. For example, CBL2 discussed how she sent information to member restaurants recently, regarding the SBA's Restaurant Revitalization Fund. Also, at the beginning of COVID-19, CBL2 used the State of Ohio's public database to determine which Chamber B members were eligible for a liquor rebate, and she then emailed those members so that they were aware of the rebate.

Chamber B leaders and engaged members also mentioned the importance of using personal appeals to secure member engagement (mainly volunteer hours and donations). When seeking out volunteers and donations, CBL2 stated that Chamber B has had good success with directly approaching current engaged members and new members who express interest in deepening their chamber connections. Both CBM3 and CBM5 remarked that they have donated to the chamber because they were directly approached about donation activities. CBL5 stated that personal appeals have positively impacted retention and members have remarked that they appreciate that the chamber reaches out to them directly and does not only use email.

The final subtheme of communication is a formal new member onboarding process that Chamber B provides, using both one-on-one meetings and twice yearly in-person onboarding events. A significant part of CBL4's role includes onboarding all new members, which he has accomplished via Zoom due to COVID-19. CBL4 developed a PowerPoint presentation that thoroughly covers all of the benefits/affinity programs of the chamber and introduces new members to the various opportunities for engaging with the chamber (events and volunteer options etc.). CBL4 thinks that the one-on-one approach proves very effective because he can have a personalized conversation regarding how the business can best capitalize on the chamber given their specific business needs. Following the one-on-one meetings, a board member then follows up with the new members at one, three, and nine months. CBL5 also discussed how Chamber B provides "mini" one-on-one onboardings to new chamber representatives from current chamber member organizations. One of the challenges that Chamber B has is the turnover of representatives at the larger chamber member organizations, but CBL5 expressed that performing the "mini" one-on-one onboardings allows the chamber leaders to educate the new representatives on the chamber's value proposition.

In addition to the one-on-one meetings, Chamber B has also had success with hosting twice yearly in-person onboardings (prior to COVID-19). During COVID-19, Chamber B continued to provide those orientations in a virtual format which they recorded and placed on the chamber's YouTube channel. Chamber B plans to continue the dual onboarding approach of both in-person and one-on-one orientations, as chamber leaders consider both to be best practices for engaging and retaining members. According to CBL5, the onboardings "get people engaged immediately" and they positively impact retention because new members will remember that the chamber reached out numerous times throughout the year to keep them engaged.

Lack of Time and Resources.

The final theme the researcher discovered was the lack of time and resources expressed by Chamber B leaders and engaged members, which negatively impacts member engagement. This theme included the subthemes of work and personal conflicts, and lack of organizational resources, including working capital and staffing.

Every Chamber B engaged member and a majority of leaders remarked that lack of time negatively impacts member engagement. CBL1 stated that “everyone seems to be exceptionally busy both personally and professionally in this day and age, and I do not find that people are willing to give up a lot of time.” CBL2 agreed and stated, “Business owners are constantly busy, and many representatives wear many hats or have many roles within the organizations, so they do not have the time.” CBL3 called the problem a “time crunch” that appears to be getting worse and not better. The number one objection that CBL4 receives when he works to increase member engagement is time. According to CBL4, members have stated, “I am busy, and I do not have the time to do one more thing.” Engaged Chamber B members all made similar statements regarding their lack of time. CBM1’s busy schedule results in him not being able to attend a number of events, which is also the case with CBM2, CBM3, CBM4, and CBM5. CBM3 summarized the time challenge well when he stated that “I guess time is the issue. There simply is not enough of it. You want to be there, but you just cannot do it all.”

The second subtheme of lack of organizational resources also negatively impacted member engagement. Four Chamber B leaders (CBL1, CBL2, CBL3, and CBL4) all remarked that chamber members have expressed that lack of working capital has impacted their engagement in the chamber. CBM1, CBM3, and CBM4 agreed that they all have set budgets, which impact the amount that they can invest in Chamber B. CBM3 remarked, “I only have so much money to invest. I have a budget. I can do things within reason, but you cannot do everything.” CBM1 and CMB4 also referenced lack of staffing. In the case of CBM1, he stated that staffing levels at his organization fluctuate, and, at times, he cannot participate in Chamber B events because lack of staffing. CMB4 did not mention organizational staffing challenges at her organization, but she referred to the small staff at the chamber and how that negatively impacts what can member engagement initiatives chamber leaders can accomplish.

Comparison of Chambers A and B.

The researcher completed a cross-case analysis that compared the discovered themes and leadership strategies for member engagement in Chambers A and B. Table 3 included in the Representation and Visualization of Data section, presents a summary comparing the leadership strategies and noted best practices in Chambers A and B. Significant similarities exist between the member engagement approaches at the two chambers and the researcher discovered very few differences. The below paragraphs discuss the similarities and differences according to discovered themes.

Strong, Trusting Relationships.

Leaders at both Chambers A and B strive to build strong, trusting relationships by making personal connections, displaying benevolence and responsiveness, taking voluntary action, and providing transparent communication (note that the researcher discussed this approach under the theme of communication). Leaders and members at both chambers considered all of these discovered subthemes best practices that promoted member engagement. The sole difference identified between the two chambers includes the fact that Chamber B leaders and members did not comment on the integrity displayed by Chamber B leaders while this was a prevalent subtheme in Chamber A. Chamber B engaged members did comment on the leadership skills of Chamber B leaders; for example, CMB3 stated, “I have full confidence in the leadership of the chamber.” However, that specific comment among others did not specifically apply to integrity, defined in this study as leading by example, having morals, being fair, and keeping promises.

Meeting Members’ Needs and Motivations by Providing Valuable Benefits.

Like the previous theme, numerous similarities exist between Chamber A and Chamber B in their approaches to providing valuable benefits that meet member needs. The researcher discovered that both chambers struggle with meeting the needs of members because they vary by member. Despite that challenge, both chambers prioritize providing value by offering cost savings, connections/networking, member visibility, varied and quality learning programs, positive community impact, flexible approaches, and informational resources. In addition, both chambers use creativity to effectively address member needs. Chamber A and B leaders and members considered the majority of these best practices in the chambers with a few minor exceptions. Chamber A and B leaders and members did not mention cost savings and providing informational resources as best practices. Chamber B leaders and members also did not consider the chamber’s community impact and use of creativity a best practice.

The differences discovered between Chambers A and B pertain to cost savings, member visibility, and flexible approaches. Unlike Chamber B, Chamber A provides a professional development grant program that offers costs savings to numerous members each year. In contrast, Chamber B provides a 50% savings on Aflac insurance, which Chamber A does not provide to its members. With regards to member visibility, Chamber B promotes member businesses using spotlights, a strategy that Chamber A does not utilize. Lastly, while both chambers display flexibility when scheduling of events in order to provide numerous options to members (days of week and times of day), only Chamber B provides dues flexibility with its tiered dues structure. Plus, Chamber B created a member visit committee that provides members with challenging schedules the opportunity to engage with other members according to their own availability.

Welcoming and Community-Based Culture.

Comments of Chamber A and Chamber B leaders and engaged members clearly showed that both chambers have healthy, welcoming, and community-based cultures that support a sense of belongingness. The researcher found that the leaders in both Chamber A and B provide an inclusive, open-minded, and welcoming environment; display positivity; and encourage camaraderie, teamwork, and collaboration. In both chambers, study participants viewed the leaders' positive mindset a best practice that supports member engagement.

Strategic Planning.

Leaders in both Chambers A and B prioritize strategic planning and use current strategic plans to guide their member engagement efforts. Chamber A and B's strategic plans each have mission statements, specific engagement goals, and accompanying strategies. In addition, chamber leaders track process and regularly discuss the accomplishment of those strategies at monthly board meetings. Chamber B also has a stated vision that guides the chamber's efforts, while Chamber A is in the process of creating its first vision statement. With regards to tracking and measurement, both Chambers A and B collect data and have a series of metrics that they use to measure accomplishment of goals and strategies. One key difference between the two chambers is that Chamber B has a more extensive measurement system that tracks 14 member-specific engagement metrics. Chamber B then uses its detailed engagement management tracking system to rank members each year, according to engagement, and then follow up with lesser-engaged members. Numerous Chamber A and B leaders considered their chambers' approach to strategic planning a best practice because the plans enable all chamber leaders to focus on goals that will successfully impact member engagement.

Providing Support.

Both Chamber A and B leaders and engaged members discussed the importance of providing support to volunteers and donors, which, in turn, positively impacts engagement. The researcher found all subthemes of providing support in each chamber with a few discernable differences. With regards to offering training and guidelines, Chamber A provides more formalized training for volunteers of larger events, while Chamber B does not take this approach. Instead, Chamber B provides "volunteer descriptions" to volunteers so that they understand their responsibilities at events. In addition, Chamber B has created "job descriptions" for each chamber committee, which provide significant committee details and information on responsibilities to committee members and potential members. Chamber A does not provide this level of committee detail to volunteers in a written format. Both Chambers A and B recognize a volunteer each year with the Bright Star Award, but Chamber B also recognizes a volunteer of the year at an annual luncheon. Chamber A and B's approach to the other subthemes of connecting skills with opportunities, showing appreciation, and using empowerment are very similar.

Communication.

Communication was the only theme discovered in this study that every Chamber A and B leader and engaged member discussed during interviews, which emphasizes its importance in successful member engagement. Leaders at Chambers A and B prioritize providing consistent, clear, and frequent communication that conveys value, and they consider their approaches a best practice. They use effective message design and various communication channels to remain top-of-mind with their members. The only difference discovered between the communication channel approaches of both chambers is that Chamber A also communicates via text with members who have signed up for their group text service.

Leaders at both Chambers A and B also customize messages, a practice which includes occasionally segmenting messages to specific industry clusters and frequently making personal appeals to members which support participation, volunteering, and donations. Chamber B also has a member visit committee that, prior to COVID-19, personally visited member businesses in order to capture updated member information and encourage member engagement.

Both Chamber A and B have formalized onboarding processes for new members which include numerous points of contact. The onboardings begin with one-on-one meetings and chamber leaders then follow up with new members at three different points throughout the year. Leaders at both Chamber A and B consider the onboarding processes a best practice because the process immediately gets new members involved in what the chambers can offer. In addition, each chamber supplements the one-on-one in-person onboardings with occasional in-person onboarding/orientation events.

Lack of Time and Resources.

Leaders of Chamber A and B both face the same challenges to member engagement, lack of time, and resources. Leaders and engaged members of both chambers repeatedly discussed how lack of time negatively impacts member engagement in the chamber; other work and/or personal commitments of members oftentimes compete with chamber events and opportunities. Both chambers also face limited resources (working capital and staffing), which limits leaders' member engagement efforts at the chamber. Engaged members also expressed having challenges with limited budgets and organizational staffing, which at times negatively impacts their level of engagement.

Representation and Visualization of the Data

Figure 2, below, illustrates the findings of this study. In the figure, the seven discovered themes surround member engagement. Six of the themes support member engagement, and the researcher included these themes as high-level leadership strategies in the study's leadership model. A green arrow illustrates this positive relationship. Unlike the other themes, the seventh theme, lack of time and resources, poses a threat to member engagement. A red arrow illustrates this negative relationship.

Relationships also exist between some of the seven discovered themes. The researcher illustrated these relationships with blue arrows. As presented in Crane's (2018) holistic stakeholder trust model, transparency (referred to as providing consistent, clear, and frequent communication in this study) builds trust in relationships. Therefore, the model shows a positive relationship between communication and strong, trusting relationships. As previously discussed, providing support closely relates to meeting members' needs and motivations by providing valuable benefits, and, for that reason, the model shows a positive relationship between these two themes. Comments of chamber leaders and members suggested that a welcoming and community-based culture and the meeting of their needs results in the building of strong, trusting relationships, so the model illustrates positive relationships between these themes. Finally, the process of strategic planning involves chamber leaders identifying valuable benefits that they can provide to members. Therefore, the model shows a positive relationship between strategic planning and meeting members' needs and motivations with valuable benefits.

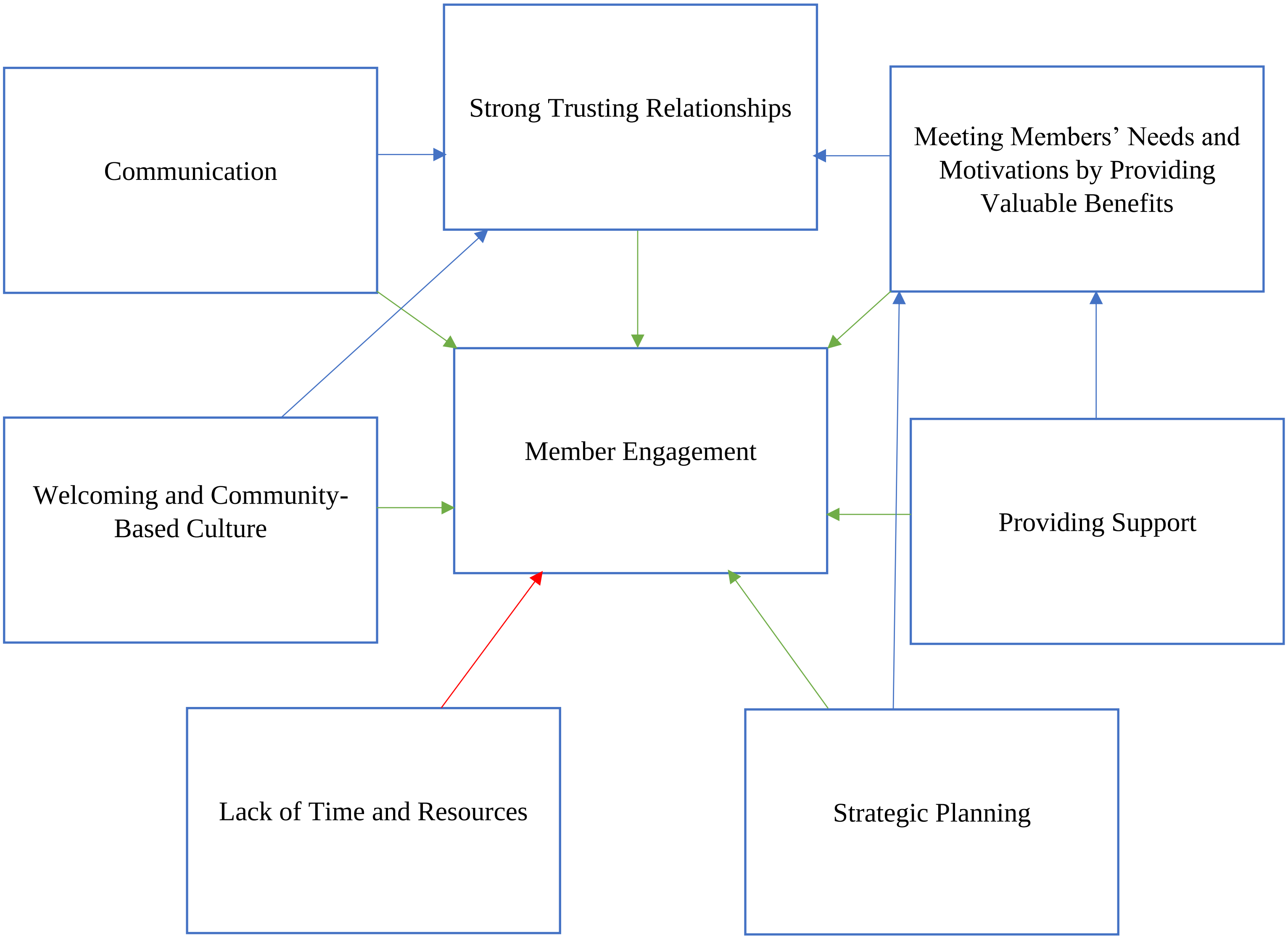

Figure 2. *Study themes showing positive or negative relationship with member engagement and relationships between themes.*

In addition, Table 3, below, summarizes the six major leadership strategies of this study's leadership model for member engagement and the accompanying sub-strategies used by Chambers A and B. If Chamber A or B leaders and/or engaged members mentioned the sub-strategy as a best practice, the researcher noted this in the table.

Table 3

Comparison of Leadership Strategies for Member Engagement at Chambers A and B

Leadership Strategy	Chamber A	Chamber B
Build strong, trusting relationships		
Make a personal connection - Connect with members	X*	X*
Display integrity – Lead by example, have morals, display fairness, and keep promises	X*	
Ensure responsiveness - Listen and respond to needs	X*	X*
Seek feedback	X	X
Meetings	X	X
Surveys	X	X
Emails	X	X
Phone calls	X	X
Show benevolence - Show caring behavior and commitment to members	X*	X*
Take voluntary action – Perform unrequired items/actions	X*	X*
Offer valuable benefits that align with members' needs and motivations		
Provide value	X	X
Cost savings	X	X
Connections/networking	X*	X*
Visibility	X*	X*
Varied and quality learning programs	X*	X*
Community impact	X*	X
Flexible approach (scheduling and/or dues etc.)	X	X

Leadership Strategy	Chamber A	Chamber B
Provide value - continued		
Informational resources	X	X
Use creativity	X*	X
Build a welcoming and community-based culture		
Provide inclusive, open minded, and welcoming environment	X*	X
Display positivity	X*	X*
Encourage camaraderie, teamwork, and collaboration	X	X
Prioritize strategic planning		
Set mission	X*	X*
Set vision	X	X
Develop measurable goals	X*	X*
Collect data	X*	X*
Measure results	X*	X*
Provide support (pertains primarily to volunteers)		
Connect skills with opportunities	X*	X
Offer training and guidelines	X	X
Show appreciation	X*	X
Use empowerment	X*	X
Present awards/recognition	X	X

Leadership Strategy	Chamber A	Chamber B
Effectively communicate		
Provide consistent, clear, and frequent communication that conveys value	X*	X*
Effective message design	X	X
Use various channels	X	X*
Social media	X	X*
Email (including newsletters)	X	X
Phone	X	X
Website	X	X
Text messages	X	
Event announcements	X	X
Handwritten notes	X	X
Customize messages	X	X
Segmentation	X	X
Personal appeals and member visits	X*	X
Host member onboardings	X*	X*
Group events	X	X
One-on-one	X	X

* Leadership strategies mentioned as best practices for member engagement.

Relationship of the Findings

This section discusses how the findings of this study relate to the study's four research questions, conceptual framework, anticipated themes, literature review, and stated problem.

The Research Questions.

The researcher designed the research questions to better understand why leaders struggle with engagement and what specific actions chamber of commerce leaders currently take to effectively address the challenge of member engagement. The questions also sought to understand how the actions of chamber of commerce leaders to support member engagement ultimately impact member retention. The final research question sought to identify best practices used by chamber of commerce leaders and also to identify those found in the scholarly literature that pertain to other types of associations. The below paragraphs discuss the relationship between the findings and the research questions.

Research Question #1.

The study's first research question asked what challenges and issues chamber leaders encounter in engaging members. The findings show that chamber leaders of both case study sites struggle with meeting the needs of members because they vary by member. In other words, members value different benefits and therefore in order to maximize member engagement chamber leaders must provide benefits that appeal to members with a variety of needs. Chamber leaders also encounter the challenges of lack of time and resources. Numerous engaged members discussed how lack of time negatively impacts their level of member engagement. Plus at times, both leaders and engaged members lack resources (working capital and staffing), which can limit the level of engagement from members and the engagement initiatives that chamber leaders seek to undertake.

Research Question #2.

The study's second research question asked how chamber of commerce leaders effectively engage members. The findings show the prevalence of six major leadership themes present at both case study sites, which include: strong, trusting relationships; meeting members' needs and motivations by providing valuable benefits; a welcoming and community-based culture; strategic planning; providing support; and communication. Based on these themes, and this study's literature review, the researcher created the leadership model for member engagement in chambers of commerce (Appendix E). The leadership model includes the following high-level leadership strategies that directly map to the discovered themes: build strong, trusting relationships; offer valuable benefits that align with members' needs and motivations; build a welcoming and community-based culture; prioritize strategic planning; provide support; and effectively communicate. Note that Appendix E provides a condensed version of the conceptual framework for this study; the conceptual framework differentiates each of the member engagement dimensions and the relationships mentioned in the literature between those dimensions, leadership strategies, and member engagement. In comparison, Appendix E collapses the four member dimensions into member engagement as a whole and the leadership model shows positive relationships between each of the six leader strategies and member engagement. The leadership model also shows positive relationships between some of the leader strategies. Each of the six leadership strategies has accompanying sub-strategies that enable leaders to effectively accomplish the leadership strategies. Table 3 lists all of the sub-strategies discovered in this study. Chamber leaders and/or engaged members mentioned all of those sub-strategies during interviews in response to questions that asked what actions chamber leaders take to encourage and sustain the four specific dimensions of member engagement.

Research Question #3.

The study's third research question sought to understand how the engagement strategies of chamber of commerce leaders help support member retention. Chamber A leaders and engaged members felt that strong, trusting relationships between leaders and members supported member retention. Chamber B leaders did not connect relationships with retention, yet one Chamber B engaged member stated that his relationships with chamber leaders influences his decision to renew.

Chamber A and B leaders and engaged members all agreed that members renew because the chamber provides value to its members. As discussed, Chambers A and B provide value by offering cost savings, connections/networking, visibility, varied and quality learning programs, community impact, flexible organizational approaches, and informational resources. Chamber members remarked that the value added to their businesses from cost savings, connections/networking, visibility, varied and quality learning program, community impact, and informational resources all supported their decisions to renew membership. In short, members choose to renew when they receive valuable benefits.

With regards to the welcoming and community-based culture of each chamber, Chamber A and B leaders and engaged members expressed that connectedness to a team positively impacts member retention. When members feel part of a team that has successful collaboration and a sense of camaraderie, they will renew their membership in order to remain a part of that team.

The theme of strategic planning has a direct connection to member retention in both Chambers A and B because the strategic plans of each specifically have member retention goals and metrics. Chamber A and B leaders remarked that having a strategic plan enables chamber leaders to focus on goals and ultimately achieve them. Therefore, because member retention is a stated goal, leaders from both chambers will consistently work to achieve that goal.

Chamber A and B leaders' support of engaged members also supports member retention. Comments of Chamber A and B leaders mentioned that both chambers experience very little volunteer turnover on the majority of chamber committees. As a result, the leaders conclude that efforts to support member volunteers such as training provided by Chamber A, job descriptions provided by Chamber B, and the showing of appreciation by both Chambers A and B must ultimately support member retention.

Finally, the most prevalent theme of communication has a significant and positive impact on member engagement. Chamber A and B members agreed that effective communication keeps members engaged and renewing. The use of numerous communication channels, customized/personal appeals, and new member onboarding processes were all considered to encourage and support member retention.

Research Question #4.

The study's final research question sought to discover the best practices that chamber leaders should use to increase member engagement. The researcher asked all study participants questions regarding the most effective actions of leaders that supported the four member engagement dimensions. Based on the answers to those questions, the researcher concluded that numerous sub-strategies of each high-level leadership strategy are best practices worth utilizing in chambers of commerce. Table 3 lists the best practice leadership strategies mentioned by Chamber A and B leaders and engaged members. Based on these discovered best practices and best practices found in the literature, the researcher created a leadership best practices guide for member engagement in chambers of commerce (Appendix D). The majority of strategies in this guide originate from the findings of this study; however, the researcher also added applicable best practices from scholarly literature that focused on member engagement in nonprofit associations and volunteer engagement in nonprofit organizations. The additions in Appendix D that do not appear in Table 3 include build ability (sub-strategy of building strong, trusting relationships), supply resources, provide guidance from staff and/or volunteers, provide feedback, and connect with mentor support (sub-strategies of provide support).

The Conceptual Framework.

The conceptual framework for this study consists of a leadership model for member engagement which the researcher created after an extensive review of the current literature that pertained to member engagement in nonprofit associations and volunteer engagement in nonprofit organizations. Six of the seven discovered themes in this study map directly to the conceptual framework. The researcher did not include the seventh theme, lack of time and resources, in the conceptual framework because the model does not include challenges to member engagement. However, the literature review addressed the lack of time and resources in nonprofit associations. As the findings illustrate, the six leadership strategies in the conceptual framework (Figure 1) support member engagement. In addition, once members express engagement, they renew their membership.

Anticipated Themes.

The anticipated themes in this study included the six leadership strategies in the conceptual framework (Figure 1). As discussed above, the researcher confirmed the presence of those themes in both Chambers A and B and their support of member engagement in both chambers.

The Literature.

The literature review for this study focused in large part on six leadership strategies for member engagement: building strong, trusting relationships; providing support; offering valuable benefits that align with members' needs and motivations; prioritizing strategic planning; building a welcoming and community-based culture; and effectively communicating. The discovered themes in this study closely align with the previous literature that studied member engagement in nonprofit associations and volunteer engagement in general nonprofit organizations.

According to Gammel (2011), strong and healthy relationships drive the highest-value opportunities for engaging members. In addition, trust serves as the foundation of healthy relationships (Huang & Chen, 2016; Thompson, 2018). This study's findings support both of these concepts. Leaders at both Chamber A and B use a majority of Crane's (2018) trust building dimensions to build strong, trusting relationships with members. Chamber A and B leaders clearly display benevolence and responsiveness, take voluntary action, and provide transparent communication. Specifically with regards to responsiveness, Chamber A and B leaders prioritize listening and provide numerous opportunities for members to express their needs so that the leaders can effectively respond and meet those needs. Chamber A leaders also display integrity by being fair, keeping promises, and having morals.

The literature stresses that associations must provide value to members (Stoffel, 2015). Association leaders can provide that value if they offer benefits that meet the needs and motivations of members (Ki & Wang, 2016). This is no easy task because Sladek (2011) stresses that members have different needs, values, wants, and motivations. Chamber A and B leaders clearly expressed having this challenge. However, despite that challenge, the study findings show that Chamber A and B leaders have effectively provided value to members in the form of numerous benefits. Those benefits aligned with Bennett's (2000) private incentives which specifically benefit individual members, and Bennett's (2000) public incentives which benefit the greater whole of the membership and/or community. Wang and Ki (2018) state that members who perceive that their needs have been met by an association have a more positive attitude toward the association, and this study's findings confirmed that, as members repeatedly remarked that they renewed membership because the chambers provided value.

Sladek (2011) advocates that culture plays a significant role in associations' ability to attract, retain, and engage members. In addition, Sladek (2011) states that members value positive and community-focused cultures. The findings of this study support the importance of a positive and community-focused environment. In this study, community focus is embodied in the camaraderie, teamwork, and collaboration that engaged members enjoy. Members of an organization also want to feel acceptance and affiliation according to Fleming (2018); engaged members in this study confirmed this, as they valued the inclusive, open-minded, and welcoming environments of Chambers A and B.

Soker (2016) stresses the importance of having clear goals so that leaders know what they have to accomplish and so that they do not waste resources on activities that do not provide value to members. In addition, Gammel (2011) advocates the importance of having specific member engagement goals. Both Chambers A and B prioritize goal setting as part of a consistent strategic planning process and member engagement serves as a key goal in both of the organizations' strategic plans. Chamber A and B leaders stated that having goals allows them to focus on achieving results that will positively impact member engagement. This aligns with Jacobs (2014) work which advocates that having focus enables associations to deliver on promises made to members. While both Chambers A and B do not have stand-alone member engagement plans suggested by Gammel (2011), each chamber has specific goals, objectives, and strategies in their strategic plans, which leaders designed to support member engagement and ultimately member retention.

The literature shows that leaders can effectively support volunteer engagement by providing task-oriented and emotion-oriented support (Alfes et al., 2016). With regards to task-oriented support, Chamber A offers training and Chamber B provides specific guidelines for volunteers. Both Chambers A and B provide emotion-oriented support by showing appreciation and presenting awards to volunteers. Malinen and Harju (2017) find that, by using strategies to increase perceptions of support, leaders succeed in encouraging engagement. This study's findings confirm that, as both chambers experience minimal volunteer turnover, which leaders attribute to the support volunteers receive.

Scholars agree that clear and effective communication enables leaders to engage association members (Jones, 2016; Abel & Howard, 2017; Martin & Waxman, 2017). The findings of this study support that conclusion, as Chamber A and B members agreed that effective communication keeps them engaged and renewing. Both Chambers A and B use the following best practices mentioned in the literature: effective message design, multi-channel communications, onboarding programs, and customization. Chambers A and B pay attention to message design, which Hunjet et al. (2017) considers a key principle of effective communication. Both chambers also use numerous communication channels, a strategy that aligns with Dalton and Dignam’s (2007) finding that association members have a variety of communication preferences and therefore want to receive information by various means. Leaders in Chambers A and B also recognize the importance of focusing on new members, which Coe (2014) advocates, because the chambers have designed year-long onboarding processes that immediately engage new members in the chambers. Jacobs (2014) suggest that those onboardings (orientations) have a variety of approaches, which both Chambers A and B use, as they have one-on-one and group event onboarding options. In addition, Chamber B has an onboarding video. Finally, each chamber uses message customization as advocated by Jacobs (2014), Myers (2016), Soker (2016), and Fabbri (2019). That customization, which includes segmentation and personal appeals, enables chamber leaders to engage members at a deeper level in comparison to generic messaging which Soker (2016) considers superficial.

The findings of this study closely related to the literature review and helped to address the gap in the literature related to member engagement in associations – specifically, in chambers of commerce. Nesbit et al. (2016) advocates that more research needs to address leadership challenges in associations; this study helped to accomplish that by focusing on the key challenge of member engagement and developing a leadership model and best practices guide for member engagement that leaders can use in nonprofit associations and chamber of commerce.

The Problem.

The problem addressed in this study is the failure of nonprofit association leaders, and specifically chamber of commerce leaders in northeast Ohio, to engage members resulting in decreased retention. Engaged members provide significant value to associations and therefore leaders must focus on strategies that strengthen member engagement (Martin, 2016). According to Wang and Ki (2018), proven methods to better engage members in associations would serve as an invaluable resource for leaders. This study sought to discover those proven methods/effective strategies to engage chamber of commerce members and then develop a leadership model for member engagement and accompanying best practices guide. This study used two chamber of commerce case study sites with above average member retention rates to understand the most effective leadership strategies for member engagement.

This qualitative multiple case study's findings suggest that six leadership strategies support member engagement. When used, those leadership strategies effectively support the four dimensions of member engagement. In addition, the findings show how the six leadership strategies also support member retention and what challenges chamber of commerce leaders face when working to engage members. Finally, the findings suggest a number of best practice strategies for member engagement that chamber of commerce leaders can utilize to strengthen member engagement.

Summary of the Findings

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case research study was to add to the scholarly body of knowledge by first discovering effective strategies to engage chamber of commerce members. Then, the researcher developed a leadership model for member engagement and identified best practices that chamber of commerce leaders should use to engage members. The researcher discovered six main themes that the researcher used to develop a leadership model and best practices guide for member engagement. The leadership model's six leadership strategies for member engagement include building, strong, trusting relationships; providing support; offering valuable benefits that align with members' needs and motivations; prioritizing strategic planning; building a welcoming and community-based culture; and effectively communicating. This model and best practices guide for member engagement is the first of its kind in scholarly literature. Participants shared their perspectives on member engagement from either a chamber leader or engaged member perspective. While chamber leaders faced lack of time and resource challenges, the use of these six leadership strategies and numerous discovered sub-strategies effectively supported member engagement in each chamber. In addition, the findings show how these strategies positively impacted member retention. Finally, the study findings resulted in a list of best practices currently used by chamber leaders to engage members, which the researcher supplemented with additional best practices found in the literature.

Application to Professional Practice

Nonprofit association leaders, including chamber of commerce leaders, need to consistently attract and retain members in order to ensure organizational survival (Dadush, 2017). In addition, association leaders also need to actively engage members because, by strengthening engagement, leaders ultimately strengthen their organizations, as engaged members are more likely to renew (Henczel, 2016). This study's findings show that by using six broad-based leadership strategies and associated sub-strategies, chamber leaders will potentially support and increase member engagement thus positively impacting member retention. The below paragraphs discuss how the findings of this study can improve general business practice and numerous application strategies that chamber leaders can use to leverage the study's findings.

Improving General Business Practice

The study's findings illustrate the importance of chamber leaders building strong, trusting relationships with members. Leaders can accomplish this by making personal connections, showing integrity, displaying benevolence and responsiveness, taking voluntary action, and providing transparent communication. Members find meaning and value in having personal connections with chamber of commerce leaders, which then impacts their member retention. Members also value integrity displayed by chamber leaders. If chamber leaders show fairness, lead by example, keep promises, and have morals, members appreciate their leadership approach. Additionally, when chamber leaders show care/benevolence towards members, the members react by staying engaged and renewing. Finally, when chamber leaders actively listen to members and act on feedback given by members, members express greater commitment to the organization.

The importance of providing value to chamber members was also a key finding of this study. Members will engage and renew if they determine that they receive value. Various members defined value differently, which challenges chamber leaders, but they must accept the challenge and consistently work towards providing value. In this study, chamber members valued cost savings, connections/networking, visibility, varied and quality learning programs, community impact, flexible organizational approaches, and information resources. Receiving value from a majority of these benefits resulted in chamber members wanting to renew; therefore, chamber leaders should focus on offering each of these benefits.

In addition to defining what chamber members value most, this study also described chamber cultures that support engagement and retention. In short, chamber members want to feel welcomed and actively included in chambers. This aligns with Fleming's (2018) work which advocates that members in associations want to feel affiliation and acceptance. Chamber leaders can successfully create this environment by being inclusive, welcoming, and open-minded. Engaged members in this study also appreciated leaders having a positive mindset and supporting a team-oriented environment. With this type of culture present in a chamber, members truly feel part of a community.

Scholars recognize strategic planning as a best practice in nonprofit organizations and this study illustrates the positive impact of strong strategic plans on member engagement and retention. Both chambers' clear and focused plans provided a strong and targeted foundation for accomplishing member engagement and retention goals. Chamber leaders adamantly expressed that having clear missions, visions, and goals kept leaders focused on actions that positively impact the organizations. However, chambers of commerce will only reap the highest benefit from strategic planning if the plans include measurable goals which chamber leaders consistently track and measure. The strategic plans of each chamber were living documents that chamber leaders discussed at each board meeting; this approach maintains chamber leaders' focus on desired outcomes.

Beyond strategic planning, this study also highlights the importance of chamber volunteers and providing them the right type of support to ensure their engagement and ultimate retention. Chamber members want to use their skill sets to support their chamber, so chamber leaders must proactively connect members with opportunities that fit their abilities. Chamber leaders can also support volunteers by empowering them, offering training and guidelines, showing appreciation, and presenting awards/recognition. All of these are low-cost engagement methods that when used successfully retain volunteers.

The final leadership strategy that chamber leaders must focus on is effective communication. The findings of this study illustrate how effective communication strengthens chamber members' engagement and retention. As shown by the findings, chamber members like that chamber leaders use numerous channels for providing information, and they also want chamber communications to communicate value. Chamber leaders can also use message customization, which includes segmenting communications and making personal appeals, as customization supports participation, volunteering, and donations. Finally, both chambers in this study experienced positive outcomes from having one-on-one and group onboardings because they immediately get new members involved in what the chambers can offer. Therefore, leaders should prioritize providing onboarding options.

Potential Application Strategies

In short, the researcher recommends that chamber of commerce leaders consistently use this study's leadership model (Appendix E), and best practices guide for member engagement (Appendix D) as organizational planning tools. The researcher formulated both of these documents using the findings of this study and scholarly literature that pertains to member and volunteer engagement in nonprofit organizations. The leadership model provides a visual display of the relationships between member engagement and the six high-level leadership strategies. The best practices guide for member engagement then lists the sub-strategies of each high-level leadership strategy and provides examples and/or a description of the sub-strategies.

In order to build strong, trusting relationships the researcher suggests that chamber leaders follow Crane's (2018) holistic stakeholder trust model, in addition to personally connecting with members. As previously discussed, Crane's (2018) model includes building ability, displaying integrity, showing benevolence, ensuring responsiveness, taking voluntary action, and being transparent (discussed later in this section). Chamber leaders can build ability by investing in professional development that ensures their effective use of current best practices and strategies. Leaders display integrity by being fair to all members, delivering on promises, leading by example, and having strong morals. Chamber leaders can show benevolence by sincerely caring about members and being committed to their success. As for taking voluntary action, chamber leaders can accomplish this by "going the extra mile" for members, which, as shown in this study, members appreciate and do not forget. With regards to ensuring responsiveness, chamber leaders should consistently seek feedback from members using announcements at meetings, emails, phone calls, and surveys. Chamber leaders can provide the surveys at a variety of times, such as after events and programs, once a year, and/or during membership renewals. Finally, chamber leaders ought to prioritize making personal connections with members. Chamber leaders can accomplish this by actively networking with members at events, sending personalized emails, and personally contacting members by telephone.

The study's findings show that chamber members seek value from their membership, and if they receive that value, their engagement increases, and they renew membership. Chamber leaders can provide value by ensuring numerous cost savings benefits, connections/networking opportunities, member visibility, varied and quality learning program, community impact, flexible organizational approaches, specialized interaction opportunities, and informational resources. Cost savings benefits can include relationships with a wide variety of vendors that offer group discounts for needed business services and goods such as utilities/energy, shipping, insurance, office supplies and more. Chamber leaders should consistently investigate potential cost savings partnerships. With regards to facilitating connections/networking, chamber leaders must continuously provide opportunities for members to connect with one another. Options for networking include events such as morning coffees, lunch and learns, and after-hours events. The literature also mentions the value of offering specialized interaction opportunities for members, such as young professional groups and women's councils. In addition to providing networking focused events, members also value a variety of quality learning programs. Chamber leaders should carefully choose high-quality and regionally known speakers who will effectively address topics of interest to members. When scheduling events/programs and determining delivery formats, chamber leaders must remember that members like having options; therefore chamber leaders should express flexibility and consider different times, days of the week, and in-person and virtual formats. Recognizing that members seek visibility for their businesses, chamber leaders ought to provide numerous visibility opportunities, such as ribbon cuttings, website listings, member spotlights, and various social media promotional posts. Chamber leaders also must serve as an information resource for members and share pertinent business-related information with members. Pertinent information could include regulatory updates, workforce development resources, local government updates etc. Finally, chamber leaders provide value to members by positively impacting the local community. Therefore, chamber members will likely appreciate and value all actions of chamber leaders that address the economic and workforce development of the community.

Numerous engaged members who participated in this study expressed the importance of a welcoming and community-based culture in the chambers. Chamber leaders can accomplish this by providing an inclusive, open-minded, and welcoming environment; displaying positivity; and encouraging camaraderie, teamwork, and collaboration. Chambers leaders must prioritize welcoming new members at events and programs and provide them with an "ambassador" who can introduce them to others in the chamber. Chamber leaders can also be open-minded to new approaches and welcome and appreciate member differences at the chamber. Differences could include demographic differences but also value differences. With regards to positivity, chamber leaders can look towards the future with optimism despite the presence of continuous challenges and impart positivity in all actions. Finally, the researcher advises chamber leaders to support the bonding of team members at the chamber (both staff and volunteers), so that all stakeholders recognize camaraderie, teamwork, and collaboration as chamber priorities. Taking these steps will support the creation and continuation of a welcoming and community-based culture.

With regards to strategic planning, the researcher recommends that chamber leaders facilitate the creation of strategic plans at least every three years and then keep the plans at the forefront of all decision-making. When creating strategic plans, chamber leaders should include numerous stakeholders, including board members, staff, and members. The key components of the strategic plan include mission and vision statements, and measurable goals with accompanying strategies. The researcher recommends having a specific member engagement and retention goal, as that keeps an organizational focus on these critical components. The researcher also recommends that chamber leaders create member engagement metrics similar to Chamber B's and then collect data in order to effectively measure those metrics. Potential member engagement metrics include number of onboarded new members, post-onboard communication activity, member retention, members participating in affinity programs, program attendance, social media/web impressions, social media followers, completed spotlights and/or ribbon cuttings, newsletter/communications open and click through rates, volunteer counts and activity, and paid member advertising/sponsorships.

Once they complete the strategic plan, chamber leaders ought to review and discuss progress updates, including key metrics, at each board meeting. Chamber leaders can best organize this process if the strategic plan lists deadlines, responsible parties, status, and notes for each strategy. The researcher suggests the color coding of all status updates for strategies, which would show completion, active progress, or minimal progress of strategies. In addition, chamber leaders can use an analysis of the member engagement key metrics to categorize members as having high, average, or low/at risk engagement. Once chamber leaders complete this analysis, they can strategically communicate with lesser engaged members.

Primarily regarding member volunteers, the researcher recommends that chamber leaders provide a wide variety of task-oriented and emotion-oriented support. Potential task-oriented support includes offering introductions/orientations/training, creating specific guidelines, supplying resources, and providing guidance from staff and/or other volunteers. Chamber leaders can offer formal or informal introductions/orientations/training, and specific guidelines can include written procedures and/or job descriptions for committees and stand-alone volunteer opportunities. Chamber leaders can also supply necessary resources to member volunteers, such as equipment, needed information, legal protection, and expense reimbursement. The last task-oriented support includes providing guidance from staff and/or volunteers, which chamber leaders can accomplish by giving a specific lead contact at the chamber for volunteer questions and/or concerns.

The emotion-oriented support options include connecting member skills with complimentary opportunities, creating networking opportunities, providing feedback, showing appreciation, connecting volunteers with mentors, presenting awards and recognition, and using empowerment. When getting to know chamber members, chamber leaders can learn their skill sets and connect them with volunteering opportunities that capitalize on and align with those skill sets. In addition, chamber leaders should create networking opportunities for volunteers by hosting volunteer-specific social events and also by providing feedback to volunteers on their performance. Volunteers will also benefit from being connected with organizational mentors who can share their knowledge. The study findings also illustrate the importance of showing appreciation to volunteers, which chamber leaders can accomplish by sending handwritten or email thank you notes, mentioning volunteer names at events and in traditional and digital communications, and providing complimentary meals and/or items. Finally, presenting volunteers with formal awards that provide visibility and empowering volunteers with decision-making abilities will support volunteer engagement.

The final researcher recommendations pertain to effective communication. Chamber leaders should provide consistent, clear, and frequent communication that conveys value; customize messages; and host member onboardings. Providing consistent, clear, and frequent communications includes using effective message design that considers ease of reading and access, and using numerous communication channels. The use of bolding, headlines, subject lines, and active hyperlinks all contribute to providing a consistent and clear message. The researcher also encourages chamber leaders to use emails, phone calls, websites, text messaging, event announcements, handwritten notes, and social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn. With regards to customization, chamber leaders can use segmentation to target specific interests/needs, and/or industry clusters. In addition, chamber leaders can use personal appeals when seeking volunteers and donations and personally complete member visits to secure updated database information and encourage engagement. The final effective communication practice includes completing one-on-one, in-person, and virtual group onboardings followed by periodic outreach to members. Taking all of these steps will ensure that members have awareness of chamber opportunities and that chamber leaders continue to effectively support member engagement.

Summary of Application to Professional Practice

Member engagement and, ultimately, member retention does not occur by accident but rather as a result of chamber leaders using effective leadership strategies. By building, strong, trusting relationships; providing support; offering valuable benefits that align with members' needs and motivations; prioritizing strategic planning; building a welcoming and community-based culture; and effectively communicating chamber leaders will potentially support and strengthen member engagement and retention in their organizations.

Recommendations for Further Study

An examination of the literature shows that scholars rarely study the problems of leadership challenges and the engagement of members in nonprofit associations. In addition, researchers have done very little research in general on chambers of commerce. Therefore, this study sought to address this gap in the literature by developing a leadership model and best practices guide for member engagement in chambers of commerce. Further research could take place in other areas of the country, as this study only focused on Northeast Ohio. Additionally, this study focused on suburban chambers of commerce with less than 750 members, so researchers could expand future studies to include urban chambers of commerce with larger membership amounts.

This study used quota sampling in order to ensure that perspectives from members of different generations were included. However, the research questions did not seek to understand the differences in the perspectives between the generations; this offers an additional opportunity for future research. While this was a qualitative study, another significant research opportunity exists using a quantitative approach that takes the best practices discovered in this study and analyses their effectiveness according to chamber of commerce leaders and engaged members in numerous chambers of commerce across the United States. A further research opportunity includes a study that seeks to identify the most effective type of culture in chambers of commerce. This study helped to describe the cultures of both case study organizations, yet the study did not seek to classify them using accepted cultural styles such as those discussed in Groysberg et al. (2018). Therefore, future research could focus on studying and classifying organizational cultures in chambers of commerce with above average retention rates. Finally, this study developed a leadership model for member engagement, but the study did not investigate the most effective leadership style for engaging members in chambers of commerce. A quantitative research study could analyze the most effective leadership style in chambers of commerce; the potential research could address servant, transformational, authentic, and ethical leadership styles.

Reflections

Prior to my father's passing many years ago, he used to repeatedly mention the following quote attributed to Calvin Coolidge:

> "Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent."

After his passing, my mother gifted me numerous framed versions of this quote that my father had displayed in their home and at his office. I continued his tradition and hung this quote in my home office and in my faculty office at work. The quote has been a constant reminder that I must persist through any challenge. The last four years have been perhaps the most challenging of my life. I started this program with a consuming fulltime job, two young children, an elderly mother, and a husband who was traveling three weeks a month for work. I questioned my ability to add a doctoral program to “my plate”, but I kept recalling Coolidge’s quote and I decided to take a chance.

The chance I took at Liberty immersed me in engaging material that ended up occurring at a perfect time in my life. I enjoyed hearing the perspectives of colleagues around the globe on numerous business topics, and I appreciated the high level of support that I received from each of my professors. I then had the wonderful opportunity to build upon my passion for chambers of commerce and spend a year immersed in discovering ways that chamber of commerce leaders can strengthen their member engagement approaches. I particularly liked looking at this project from a Christian worldview and integrating my findings with the Bible’s word. Despite a global pandemic and unrelenting work and personal challenges, including a major back surgery and two years of recovery, I persisted. Now I look at this experience as one of the best personal and professional gifts I have been given.

Personal & Professional Growth

Despite all of my previous education, years of work experience, and grit, I always had personal doubts in my mind as to whether I could finish this degree. I realize now that I should have never doubted. God does not doubt! He knows that we, as his creation, can complete anything we seek to accomplish. We simply need to commit ourselves, and that is what I did. I committed to staying up late and waking up early. I committed to maintaining a balance in my life so that I never felt like I was missing out on anything in my kids' lives. I committed to being patient and to trusting the Liberty process. I committed to being flexible and open-minded as I approached learning new concepts in each class. And most importantly, I committed to trusting that God would not lead me to an opportunity that I could not achieve.

With regards to professional growth, the coursework that I completed at Liberty provided me with additional knowledge and tools that I have used in my work with Small Business Development Center clients and business management students. What I have learned at Liberty will serve as the gift that keeps on giving because I will work to consistently share that knowledge with my clients and students moving forward. I also plan on developing a no-cost training program that I can deliver to chambers of commerce across the United States with the hopes of playing a small role in supporting small businesses nationwide. Finally, thanks to Keller's (2012) book, which I read numerous times in the last four years, I finally understand and appreciate that I complete my work at home and at school in service to God and my neighbor. I commit to using each of my abilities in order to provide the greatest service to others. Thanks to the Liberty community, I now have additional skills and abilities to offer than I did four years ago.

Biblical Perspective

As previously mentioned in Section 1, man serves the role on earth of being both a builder and gardener; the gardener sees the potential in the world and creatively rearranges what God has made, while the builder ensures a strong foundation for years to come (Keller, 2012). Keller (2012) also stresses that God created man so that he would build up the human community by serving his neighbor. Scripture states, "Even the son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (*English Standard Bible, 2001,* Matthew 20:28). Chamber of commerce leaders indeed play the role of gardeners, builders, and community servants as they tirelessly work to support their member businesses and their communities. By using the leadership model developed in this study, chamber of commerce leaders will further strengthen their ability to serve as community gardeners, builders, and servants. The components of this study's leadership model all relate to and integrate with a Christian worldview, which the below paragraphs discuss. In fact, each of the six leadership model components have a foundation in the Bible.

Leaders should model their trusting relationships with others on man's relationship with God. The Bible instructs us to "Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness" (*English Standard Bible, 2001,* Psalm 37:3*).* As discovered in this study, leaders build strong, trusting relationships when they display integrity, show care, listen, and respond to others. Scripture implores man to: "Look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" (*English Standard Bible, 2001,* Philippians 2:4). Chamber of commerce leaders accomplish this when they express care for their members. Chamber leaders also actively listen to their members as promoted in the scriptures, "Making your ear attentive to wisdom and including your heart to understanding" (*English Standard Bible, 2001,* Proverbs 2:2) and "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" *(English Standard Bible, 2001,* Matthew 11:15). As for the importance of integrity, the Bible tell us that "The integrity of the upright guides them, but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them" (*English Standard Bible, 2001,* Proverbs 11:3) and "Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out" *(English Standard Bible, 2001,* Proverbs 10:9). Chamber of commerce leaders can find inspiration in these verses as they work to build strong, trusting relationships with their members.

The Bible also counsels man on the importance of providing support, meeting needs, and serving others. Jesus set the ultimate example for how we ought to serve others; scripture mentions, “The greatest among you shall be your servant” (*English Standard Bible, 2001,*Matthew 23:11). Also, we know that God will always meet man’s needs, as scripture reads, “My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (*English Standard Bible, 2001,* Philippians, 4:19). God works through the chambers of commerce to provide small businesses value that addresses their needs. Man must “Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (*English Standard Bible, 2001,* Acts 20:35). Speaking of giving, God gave each man unique gifts/skill sets that benefit others and chamber of commerce leaders can use their gifts to support members by staying true to the scripture that states, “Do not neglect to do good, and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God” (*English Standard Bible, 2001,* Hebrews 13:16).

Scripture also addresses the importance of having plans, which chamber of commerce leaders use to accomplish their mission, vision, and goals. *English Standard Bible* (2001) Proverbs 29:18 states, “Where there is no prophetic vision, the people caste off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law.” The findings of this study echo this, as chamber of commerce leaders felt that having a detailed strategic plan enabled them to stay focused and accomplish their goals. In addition, Isaiah 32:8 states, “But he who is noble plans noble things, and on noble things he stands.” Because they have plans, chamber of commerce leaders expressed confidently that they were moving in the right direction and providing the best outcomes for their members.

With regards to creating a welcoming and community-based culture, scripture encourages us all to "Welcome one another as Christ welcomed you, for the glory of God" (*English Standard Bible, 2001,* Romans 15:7) and to "Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality" (*English Standard Bible, 2001,* Romans 12:13). Comments from chamber of commerce leaders and engaged members in this study showed that they embrace this approach. In addition, as the findings of this study show, chamber of commerce members value the camaraderie, collaboration, and teamwork in chambers, which scripture supports by stating:

> "If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body (*English Standard Bible, 2001,* 1 Corinthians 12:17-20)."

Scripture also discusses the importance of positive thinking, which chamber of commerce leaders and engaged members considered very valuable in the chamber environments. According to *English Standard Bible* (2001) Philippians 4:8, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellent, if there is anything worthy of praise think about these things."

Finally, the Bible addresses effective communication by stating, "Let your speech be always filled with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (*English Standard Bible, 2001,* Colossians 4:6). Chamber of commerce leaders take this approach as they recognize that they need to effectively communicate with members that have different expectations and needs. Additionally, chamber of commerce leaders seek to provide clear and consistent communication. Scripture lauds the benefit of this approach by stating, “An unreliable messenger stumbles into trouble, but a reliable messenger brings healing” (*English Standard Bible, 2001,* Proverbs 13:17). By prioritizing effective communication, chamber leaders honor God, which is illustrated in the Bible verse, “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer” (*English Standard Bible, 2001,* Psalms 19:14).

Summary of Reflections

The process of completing this degree and dissertation provided me with a life-changing experience. Moving forward, I will share my recently acquired knowledge with both my Small Business Development Center clients and my business management students. Additionally, I will share the findings of my study with chambers of commerce nationwide with the goal of strengthening their member engagement approaches. This process also deepened my understanding of work as a service to God, and I found great satisfaction in seeing that my study’s findings strongly aligned with a Christian worldview.

Summary of Section 3

This section provided an overview of the study and a presentation of the findings, which included six main themes that the researcher used to create a leadership model and best practices guide for member engagement. The section also discussed the application of this study to professional practice in chambers of commerce and the researcher suggested a series of recommendations for strengthening member engagement. The researcher also suggested recommendations for further study based on the findings of this study. Finally, this section included reflections of the researcher regarding her personal and professional growth and the relationship of the study findings to a Christian worldview.

Summary and Study Conclusions

The findings of this doctoral research study addressed the gap in the literature regarding effective leadership strategies for engaging members in chambers of commerce. The findings of the study show that chamber leaders struggle with meeting the needs of members because they vary by member, and they also encounter the challenges of lack of time and resources. The findings also show that by building, strong, trusting relationships; providing support; offering valuable benefits that align with members' needs and motivations; prioritizing strategic planning; building a welcoming and community-based culture; and effectively communicating, chamber leaders will potentially support and strengthen member engagement and retention in their organizations. Based on the study findings, the researcher developed a leadership model and best practices guide for member engagement which chamber of commerce leaders can use to plan their member engagement strategies.

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Appendix A: Member Engagement Best Practices Checklist for Interviews

Leadership Model Components and Best Practices	**Mentions Strategy/Action**
Build Strong, Trusting Relationships	
Ability (skills to do the job, professional dev., investment in skills etc.)	
Integrity – principles and ethics	
Benevolence – sincere care for others and their needs	
Responsiveness to needs – acts to address needs	
Voluntary action – motivated to do unrequired items	
Transparency – provides clear and accurate information	
Provide Support (pertains mainly to volunteers)	
Task-oriented support	
Introduction to roles/orientation	
Specific guidelines – procedures and job description	
Resources – equipment, info, legal protection, expense reimbursement etc.	
Guidance from staff and/or volunteers	
Emotion-oriented support	
Networking opportunities – social events for volunteers	
Feedback	
Appreciation – notes, mention of name, complimentary items	
Mentor support	
Awards and recognition – formal actions	
Ensure alignment of benefits with needs and motivations	
Formal feedback mechanisms (after events, once a year, and during membership renewals	
Focus groups	
Phone calls and individual emails	
Numerous social media platforms	
Networking face to face and virtual options	
Specialized interaction opportunities (ex. Women's council)	
Set organizational mission, vision, and goals	
Mission	
Vision	
Goals	
Strategic planning process	
Member engagement goals and plans	
Engagement ladder	

Leadership Model Components and Best Practices	**Mentions Strategy/Action**
Build culture of community and belongingness	
Core values	
Effective, frequent communication	
Model behaviors	
Symbol use	
Ceremonies (ex. annual lunch)	
Socialization	
Storytelling	
Feedback surveys	
Effectively communicate	
New member orientation (event, guide, and/or videos)	
Segment and customize communication/information	
Use different channels	
Social Media	
Website	
Private online communities	
Emails/e-newsletters	

Appendix B: Interview Guide for Chamber Leaders

Interview Date____________________

Introductory Statement

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview today. The purpose of my research is to discover effective strategies to engage chamber of commerce members, to develop a leadership model for member engagement, and to identify best practices for engaging members in chamber of commerce.

I will ask you a series of questions that pertain to the four components of member engagement in nonprofit membership-based organizations. The questions are organized by each member engagement component. The four-member engagement components include commitment, volunteering (giving of time), donations (giving of money), and participation.

Please note that I encourage you to repeat your answers to the interview questions throughout the interview, if you think your answers apply to multiple questions. This will allow me to accurately answer my study's research questions. Also, please be aware that the researcher will protect the confidentiality of the chamber of commerce and all study participants, including yourself, per ethical guidelines and professional standards of academic research.

Interview Questions

- What is your role at the chamber?
- How long have you been with the chamber?
- What is your age?
- What is your gender?

Member Commitment

- What challenges and issues do you encounter when working to build member commitment and attachment to the chamber? (RQ1)
- What actions do you take to build member commitment and attachment to the chamber? (RQ2)
- Do your actions to build member commitment and attachment to the chamber impact member retention?(RQ3)
  - If they do, how do they impact member retention? (RQ3)
- Which of your actions to build member commitment and attachment are the most effective? (RQ4)
  - How do you know that they are effective? (RQ4)
- What are the key leadership skills that you utilize to encourage and increase member commitment in the chamber? (RQ2)

Member Volunteerism

- How do you attract members to volunteer for the chamber? (RQ2)
- What challenges and issues do you encounter when working to encourage and sustain member volunteerism? (RQ1)
- What actions do you take to encourage and sustain the retention of member volunteers at the chamber? (RQ2)
- Do your actions to encourage and sustain the retention of member volunteers impact member retention at the chamber? (RQ3)
    - If they do, how do they impact member retention? (RQ3)
- Which of your actions to encourage and sustain volunteer retention at the chamber are the most effective? (RQ4)
    - How do you know that they are effective? (RQ4)
- What are the key leadership skills that you utilize to encourage and sustain member volunteerism in the chamber? (RQ2)

Member Donations

- What challenges and issues do you encounter when working to encourage and increase member donations? (RQ1)
- What actions do you take to encourage and increase member donations to the chamber? (RQ2)
- Do your actions to encourage and increase member donations to the chamber impact member retention? (RQ3)
    - If they do, how do they impact member retention? (RQ3)
- Which of your actions to encourage and increase member donations are the most effective? (RQ4)
    - How do you know that they are effective? (RQ4)
- What are the key leadership skills that you utilize to encourage and increase member donations in the chamber? (RQ2)

Member Participation

- What challenges and issues do you encounter when working to encourage and increase member participation in chamber events, programs, and benefits? (RQ1)
- What actions do you take to encourage and increase member participation in chamber offerings (events, etc.)? (RQ2)

- Do your actions to encourage and increase participation in chamber offerings (events, etc.) impact member retention? (RQ3)
  - If they do, how do they impact member retention? (RQ3)
- Which of your actions to encourage and increase participation in chamber offerings are the most effective? (RQ4)
  - How do you know that they are effective?
- What are the key leadership skills that you utilize to encourage and increase member participation in the chamber? (RQ2)

Other

- Please provide any documents pertaining to board meeting minutes and agendas for the last two years, internal reports pertaining to member engagement, member survey reports for the last two years, current strategic plan and associated reports, and meeting minutes and agendas for membership and marketing if they apply to current member engagement efforts.
- Do you suggest any highly engaged chamber members who should serve as participants in this study? If so, please provide their names and email addresses.
- Is there anything that we have missed that you think is important to discuss regarding member engagement?

Additional Clarifying and Probing Questions (if needed)

- Please tell me more about that.
- Can you give me more details regarding that?
- Please elaborate for me.
- Why do you think that is the case?
- Did I correctly hear you when you said that…?
- To clarify what you just stated, do you mean that…?
- What is another way that you could say what you just said?
- I would like to paraphrase what you just said…is my summary correct?

Closing Statement

This interview is critical to the success of my research; therefore, thank you for volunteering your time and for the thoughtfulness of your responses. I will transcribe this interview and provide you with the opportunity to review it for accuracy. Please note that I will protect your name when I have any discussions regarding this study. In addition, your name will be protected in the data and the final study report. If you would like to add any information following this interview that you think will be of help to my research, please contact me.

Appendix C: Interview Guide for Engaged Chamber Members

Interview Date____________________

Introductory Statement

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview today. The purpose of my research is to discover effective strategies to engage chamber of commerce members, to develop a leadership model for member engagement, and to identify best practices for engaging members in chamber of commerce.

I will ask you a series of questions that pertain to the four components of member engagement in nonprofit membership-based organizations. The questions are organized by each member engagement component. The four-member engagement components include commitment, volunteering (giving of time), donations (giving of money), and participation.

Please note that I encourage you to repeat your answers to the interview questions throughout the interview, if you think your answers apply to multiple questions. This will allow me to accurately answer my study's research questions. Also, please be aware that the researcher will protect the confidentiality of the chamber of commerce and all study participants, including yourself, per ethical guidelines and professional standards of academic research.

Interview Questions

- How long have you been a member at the chamber?
- What is your age?
- What is your gender?
- What volunteer roles at the chamber have you held?
- Please describe your level of commitment to the chamber.
- Please describe your donation activities to the chamber. Please note that donation activities include the giving of any funds or anything of value to the chamber beyond membership dues (including sponsorship dollars, raffle items etc.).
- Please describe your level of participation in chamber offerings such as events, programs, benefits etc. Note that benefits include healthcare, FedEx discounts etc.

Member Commitment

- Why are you committed to the chamber?
- What challenges and issues do you encounter that may negatively impact your commitment and attachment to the chamber? (RQ1)
- What actions do chamber leaders take to build and sustain your commitment and attachment to the chamber? (RQ2)

- Do the actions of chamber leaders to build and sustain your commitment and attachment to the chamber impact your decision to renew chamber membership? (RQ3)
    - If they do, how do they impact your decision to renew membership? (RQ3)
- Which actions of chamber leaders are the most effective in building and sustaining your member commitment and attachment to the chamber? (RQ4)
    - Why are those actions the most effective in building and sustaining your member commitment and attachment to the chamber (RQ4)
- What key leadership skills do chamber leaders display that positively impact your commitment and attachment to the chamber? (RQ2)

Member Volunteering

- Please describe how you first got involved with volunteering for the chamber. (RQ2)
- Why do you volunteer for the chamber?
- What challenges and issues do you encounter that may negatively impact your volunteering with the chamber? (RQ1)
- What actions do chamber leaders take to encourage and sustain your volunteering at the chamber? (RQ2)
- Do the actions of chamber leaders to encourage and sustain your volunteering at the chamber impact your decision to renew chamber membership? (RQ3)
    - If they do, how do they impact your decision to renew membership? (RQ3)
- Which actions of chamber leaders are the most effective in encouraging and sustaining your volunteerism at the chamber? (RQ4)
    - Why are those actions the most effective in encouraging and sustaining your volunteerism at the chamber (RQ4)
- What key leadership skills do chamber leaders display that positively impact your volunteering in the chamber? (RQ2)

Member Donations

- Why do you donate to the chamber?
- What challenges and/or issues do you encounter that may negatively impact your donations to the chamber? (RQ1)
- What actions do chamber leaders take to encourage and sustain your donations to the chamber? (RQ2)
- Do the actions of chamber leaders to encourage and sustain your donations to the chamber impact your decision to renew chamber membership?

    - If they do, how do they impact your decision to renew membership? (RQ3)
- Which actions of chamber leaders are the most effective in encouraging and sustaining your donations to the chamber? (RQ4)
    - Why are those actions the most effective in encouraging and sustaining your donations to the chamber? (RQ4)
- What key leadership skills do chamber leaders display that positively impact your donations to the chamber? (RQ2)

Member Participation

- Why do you participate in chamber events, programs, and benefits?
- What challenges and issues do you encounter that may negatively impact your participation in chamber events, programs, and benefits etc.? (RQ1)
- What actions do chamber leaders take to encourage and increase your participation in chamber offerings (events, etc.)? (RQ2)
- Do the actions of chamber leaders to support and increase your participation in chamber offerings (events, etc.) impact your decision to renew chamber membership? (RQ3)
    - If they do, how to they impact your decision to renew membership? (RQ3)
- Which chamber leaders actions are the most effective in encouraging and increasing your participation in chamber offerings? (RQ4)
    - Why are those actions the most effective in encouraging and increasing your participation in chamber offerings? (RQ4)
- What key leadership skills do chamber leaders display that positively impact your participation in chamber offerings? (RQ2)

Other

- Please discuss all of the reasons why you renew your chamber membership. (RQ3)
- Is there anything that we have missed that you think is important to discuss regarding member engagement?

Additional Clarifying and Probing Questions (if needed)

- Please tell me more about that.
- Can you give me more details regarding that?
- Why do you think that is the case?
- Did I correctly hear you when you said that…?
- To clarify what you just stated, do you mean that…?

- What is another way that you could say what you just said?
- I would like to paraphrase what you just said…is my summary correct?

Closing Statement

This interview is critical to the success of my research; therefore, thank you for volunteering your time and for the thoughtfulness of your responses. I will transcribe this interview and provide you with the opportunity to review it for accuracy. Please note that I will protect your name when I have any discussions regarding this study. In addition, your name will be protected in the data and the final study report. If you would like to add any information following this interview that you think will be of help to my research, please contact me.

Appendix D: Leadership Best Practices Guide for Member Engagement in Chambers of Commerce

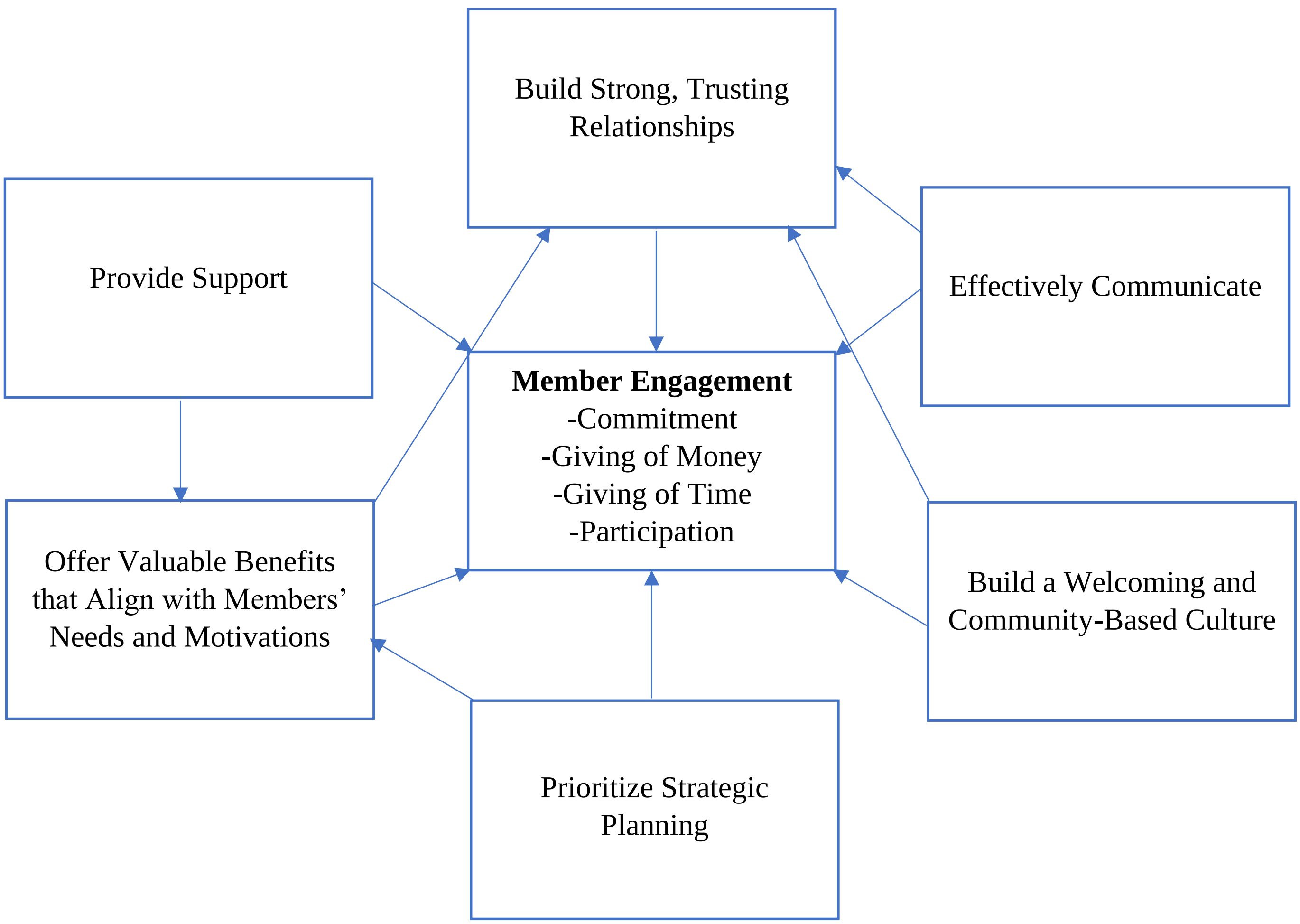
Leadership Best Practices	**Examples/Description**
Build Strong, Trusting Relationships	
1. Build ability	Invest in professional development to ensure effective use of current best practices and strategies.
2. Display integrity	Lead by example, have morals, display fairness, and keep promises.
3. Show benevolence	Show caring behavior and commitment to members.
4. Ensure responsiveness	Listen and responds to member needs. Seek feedback using: • Announcements at meetings • Surveys • Emails • Phone calls Leaders can provide surveys after events, once a year, and during membership renewals.
5. Take voluntary action	Perform unrequired items/actions.
6. Be transparent	Provide clear and accurate information (see #1 sub-strategy under Effectively Communicate).
Provide Support (pertains mainly to volunteers)	
Task-oriented support	
1. Offer introductions/orientations/training	Provide: • Introductions/orientations/training to all volunteers.
2. Create specific guidelines	Provide: • Procedures • Job descriptions (includes committee work and stand-alone volunteer opportunities)
3. Supply resources	Provide: • Necessary equipment • Information • Legal protection • Expense reimbursement

Leadership Best Practices	**Examples/Description**
Provide Support (pertains mainly to volunteers) - continued	
4. Provide guidance from staff and/or volunteers	Provide a contact for volunteer questions and/or concerns.
Emotion-oriented support	
1. Connect member skills with opportunities	Discover member skills and connect members with opportunities that capitalize on those skills.
2. Create networking opportunities	Host social events for volunteers.
3. Provide feedback	Provide feedback to volunteers on their performance
4. Show appreciation	Thank volunteers (and donors) with: • Handwritten or email notes • Name mentions at events and in traditional and digital communications • Complimentary meals/items
5. Connect with mentor support	Provide organizational mentors for new volunteers.
6. Present awards and recognition	Recognize volunteers with formal awards that provide visibility.
7. Use empowerment	Empower volunteers to make decisions and take ownership of opportunities.
Offer valuable benefits that align with members' needs and motivations	
1. Provide value to members	Offer: • Cost savings • Connections/networking • Visibility (examples – ribbon cuttings and member spotlights • Varied and quality learning programs • Community impact • Flexible scheduling of events • Face to face and virtual program opportunities • Tiered dues • Informational resources

Leadership Best Practices	Examples/Description
Offer valuable benefits that align with members' needs and motivations - Continued	
1. Provide value to members - continued	Offer: • Specialized interaction opportunities (ex. Women's council and young professionals groups)
2. Use creativity	Applies to provision of cost benefits, programs, and events etc.
Prioritize strategic planning	
1. Set mission	Promote in member communications.
2. Set vision	Promote in member communications.
3. Develop measurable goals	Complete at annual board member retreat. Promote in communications and discuss at all board meetings.
4. Collect data and measure results	Develop member engagement metrics, track data, and create reports for use in member engagement outreach efforts.
Build a welcoming and community-based culture	
1. Provide inclusive, open minded, and welcoming environment	Welcome new members at meetings and provide them with an "ambassador". Be open-minded to new approaches. Welcome differences.
2. Display positivity	Look towards the future with optimism and impart positivity in all actions.
3. Encourage camaraderie, teamwork, and collaboration	Support bonding of team members.
Effectively communicate	
1. Provide consistent, clear, and frequent communication that conveys value	Use effective message design that considers ease of reading and access: • Bolding • Headlines • Subject lines • Active hyperlinks Use numerous communications channels: • Social media – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn • Email (including newsletters)

Leadership Best Practices	Examples/Description
Effectively communicate - Continued	
1. Provide consistent, clear, and frequent communication that conveys value - continued	Use numerous communications channels: • Phone • Website • Text messages • Event announcements • Handwritten notes
2. Customize messages	Use segmentation to target specific interests/needs, and/or industry clusters. Use personal appeals when seeking volunteers and donations. Make member visits to secure updated database information and encourage engagement.
3. Host member onboardings	Complete one-on-one onboardings. Follow up onboardings with periodic reach outs throughout the year. Offer in person and/or virtual group onboardings at least twice a year.

Appendix E: Leadership Model for Member Engagement in Chambers of Commerce



Appendix F: IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

May 20, 2021

Gretchen Skok
John Kuhn

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-745 Leadership Model and Best Practices for Member Engagement in Chambers of Commerce

Dear Gretchen Skok, John Kuhn:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office