NON-EXECUTIVE ENGAGEMENT IN STRATEGIC PROJECTS

by

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Abstract

This qualitative research case study explored the engagement of low-level employees in strategic projects in a nonprofit organization. The general problem addressed is the minimal non-executive employee engagement in strategic project implementation resulting in failed objectives. The purpose of the study was to add information to the body of knowledge concerning employee engagement and strategic decision-making. Research questions examined how employees were engaged in strategic projects within their organization and what motivated those individuals to participate. The study consisted of 23 interviews for primary data collection and 42 questionnaire participants for triangulation purposes. Six themes emerged from the data analysis. The themes included participation requests, culture of care, motivation and employee relations, levels of empowerment, time constraints, and absence of knowledge. These themes are relevant to business in that they provide insight into how employees are motivated to participate in strategic projects. In completing an analysis of the data gathered and themes, it was noted that the nonprofit organization studied has higher engagement of low-level employees than found in the literature. There were two main key ideas found as to why this engagement is higher within this organization. The first is that leadership encourages participation in strategic projects, and secondly, that the overall culture of the organization is one that makes employees wish to participate because they feel committed to the mission of the organization.

Key words: employee engagement, strategic project, non-profit, transformational leadership
Dedication

This work is dedicated to five individuals. First, I want to dedicate this work to my husband, Derek. He has spent many hours helping with our two children to give me time to work on this study. He has encouraged me and has been my cheerleader throughout this entire process. For the majority of this work, he was one of the very few individuals that I told about my DBA journey, so he was the one that I always talked to, complained to, and shared my thoughts with. His support, love, listening, and time are so very appreciated. I also want to dedicate this work to my two beautiful daughters. Aerobella Rayne and Dahlia Skye, you are two amazing little girls and will grow up to be strong women. I hope my work with this study and its completion will encourage you both to do tough things. Without these three people by my side, this journey would have been so difficult. I love you all and look forward to many years together as a wonderful family. Lastly, this work is dedicated to my parents, Randy and Brenda. Unfortunately, my mother passed away one month after I began my DBA journey, and I did not get a chance to tell her that I was pursuing a degree. I know though, how extremely proud and supportive she would have been. Both of my parents have always encouraged me in my education and all aspects of my life, which brought me to where I am today. I love them both dearly and thank them for their support in everything that I have ever attempted.
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When I began my DBA journey, it was a time in my life when things were a little hectic and I wondered if I could do it. As soon as I signed up for my first course, I printed a small piece of paper with the LU logo and this verse “God will make this happen, for he who calls you is faithful” (1 Thessalonians 5:24). I placed one paper on my board in my office at work and one in the front cover of my DBA notebook as a reminder. I thank the Lord for allowing me to go through this process and giving me the knowledge and ability to complete this work.

I would like to thank my family and friends for your support and your overall encouragement. This is especially true to my friend Natasha. Due to her having her Ph.D., she has been the person that I have gone to with questions concerning this process. To my family and friends, I love you all.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Strategic planning in any business is important. Farahmand (2016) noted that strategic planning and projects are essential processes to aid in the expansion and financial growth of an organization. For strategic planning to be effective, decisions should include input from various levels within the organization (Cooke-Davies, 2017). This study gathers information in the form of a qualitative case study with the purpose of adding information to the body of knowledge concerning employee engagement and strategic decision-making.

The study was conducted in the form of interviews for main data collection and a questionnaire for triangulation. Six emerging themes arose from the data gathered and analyzed. There are three sections of this document. Section one focuses on the foundation of the study and the background information concerning the business problem. Section 2 reviews details about the project, including the method and design of the research and the population and sampling. The details of data collection and analysis are also covered in section two. Section three provides information on the application of professional practice and implications for change. This includes the findings of the study and the interpretation of themes discovered. Finally, appendices are included to provide the reader with further information and visualization of data.

Background of the Problem

The problem researched is the engagement level of employees who are not in leadership positions in strategic projects within a nonprofit organization. Organizational strategy planning includes decision-making at all levels in the company. The strategy and strategic decisions of the organization should align with the principles, values, and goals of the company as a whole (Blocher et al., 2019). In order to be successful in this planning, input is required from all levels. As mentioned by Stretton (2018), one major reason for failure in strategic projects is low to no
user involvement. A major challenge for organizations can indeed be the engagement of employees. Low employee engagement in organizations can impact the competitive advantage and overall success of a company (Taneja et al., 2015).

The same is true with nonprofit organizations. These groups are not specifically in business to make a profit but must sustain their own existence. Employee engagement and good strategic planning are necessary to do this. Prior research proves the general problem does exist in business. This study explored the reasons behind this low engagement and contributed to the body of knowledge that already existed related to this problem.

**Problem Statement**

The general problem to be addressed is the minimal non-executive employee engagement in strategic project implementation, resulting in failed objectives. According to Cooke-Davies (2017), successful strategic initiatives are not only the responsibility of the project managers and executives of the company but also individuals in the operational units. Stretton (2018) stated that one major cause of strategic project failure is no owner or user involvement. A critical challenge for organizations is the drop in overall employee engagement, which impacts competitive and strategic advantage (Taneja et al., 2015). Individual employee motivation at the executive and non-executive level is important and needed for employee focus to be placed on the future success and overall strategy of the organization (Strobel et al., 2017). Per Timming (2014), managers make judgment errors when they solely determine which employees to include in the participation of decision-making.

According to Biedenbach and Manzhynski (2016), a lack of knowledge of corporate values and lack of identification with the company’s corporate brand can cause misalignment between what employees are working to accomplish and what they perceive as being objectives.
Haskins and Freeman (2015) stated that every member of an organization decides to speak up or be silent, and if silence is the choice, the result may be problematic. The specific problem to be addressed is the minimal non-executive employee engagement in strategic project implementation within the nonprofit organization setting resulting in failed initiatives.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the involvement of low-level employees during the implementation of strategic organizational projects. The study posed questions that allowed employees to express why they do or do not participate in strategic decisions within their organization, including personal reasons or organizational justifications. This understanding explored the need for all employee involvement in strategic planning rather than only executive-level employees. The general problem was examined with an in-depth study of employee involvement, specifically in the strategic planning practices of a nonprofit organization.

**Nature of the Study**

The general problem stated concerns a business problem to be researched. To determine a pattern in the reasoning for this issue, one must use a methodology that allows for a wide variety of information and possible responses. Within methodology selection, there is the paradigm selection as well as the actual research methodology and design selection. This document is created to validate the proposed methodology and paradigm that will be used in collecting data and proper analysis for the stated general and specific problems mentioned.

The research paradigm that was used is that of post-positivism. This paradigm is derived from the positivism paradigm. The post-positivism paradigm is one that fits the researcher’s worldview as well as a way to solve business problems. The methodology discussed is that of a
flexible qualitative design. Using this methodology allowed for a case study to be conducted and various responses to be collected and analyzed.

**Discussion of Method**

Qualitative studies use questions of the “why” nature, and those that leave room for explanation are good qualitative questions. Why questions allow the respondents to elaborate on their answer instead of giving a yes/no or short word answer. The research questions for this study begin with the word “why” or “what.” The case study approach specifically allows the researcher to gain information primarily through interviews and through the use of a questionnaire for triangulation. Both are options for case studies; however, interviews may bring forth body language and non-verbal cues that suggest to the researcher further information may be relevant from the interviewee. The structure of an interview allows for analysis that may not be possible in other survey manners (Dowling et al., 2015). The qualitative method supports both the case study and interview approach.

Qualitative methodology is how information can be collected and synthesized as a whole (Liao & Hitchcock, 2018). This method allows for information to be reviewed for content rather than only statistical data and trends. Quantitative methods use data sets and most often choice answers to questions in order to have specific enough data to form statistical analysis (Hammarberg et al., 2015). The nature of this study and specific problem relates most closely to the qualitative methodology.

**Discussion of Design**

This study was conducted as a qualitative flexible case study. Qualitative studies are beneficial when the researcher is seeking information that may be made up of opinions or beliefs, and preferences (Hammarberg et al., 2015). On the other hand, quantitative methodology seeks
to uncover measurements and provide statistical analysis of the information gathered (Queiros et al., 2017). The general problem addressed is the minimal non-executive employee engagement in strategic project implementation, resulting in failed initiatives. The flexible methodology is important to allow all possible responses to surface during the study. Therefore, this research is more qualitative in nature due to the higher flexibility needed and the larger focus that will be needed to understand the problem at hand (Queiros et al., 2017).

Another reason that makes flexible qualitative design a good method for business research is the real-time nature of the methodology. The focus of the research with qualitative methods is not retrospective but made up of observations concerning current topics and processes that are in progress at the given time (Reinecke et al., 2016). When gaining this information from individuals in real-time during a process, the respondents are likely to give accurate information as they are experiencing the event. Therefore, as these individuals are going through strategic projects, it is important to receive their responses to ensure details are expressed and information is not forgotten over time.

Other possible methods for this research included quantitative and mixed methods. Quantitative methodology is used when the data gathered is structured and focused (Goertzen, 2017). The research questions for this study are open-ended, and the data that is retrieved will not be in a structured format. Individuals will not be given choices of answers other than to gather demographic information. Questions are open, and the participants were allowed to express their individual feelings about each question which means each response could vary greatly.

The mixed methodology is a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods (McKim, 2015). Due to this methodology being partial quantitative, it was not used. The research
questions are not created for quantitative analysis, and therefore qualitative methodology was chosen.

**Summary of the Nature of the Study**

The research conducted used qualitative methodology in the form of a case study to help better understand employee engagement in nonprofit organizations. Both the method and design were specifically chosen to obtain the best information possible in the case study. By completing the research using a qualitative case study, enough information was collected to add to the body of knowledge in the field of employee engagement.

**Research Questions**

RQ1: Why is there minimal engagement of employees other than those in leadership positions (President, Vice President, Dean, and Director) in strategic projects?

RQ1a: What are specific reasons that mid to low-level working individuals feel that their expertise is not needed or wanted in strategic project decision-making?

RQ1b: What organizational qualities create a desire for average working individuals to feel as if their involvement is needed and wanted in strategic projects?

RQ2: What actions are taken by leaders (President, Vice President, Dean, and Director) that contribute to the engagement effort of all other employees and stakeholders?

RQ3: Why would an employee at any level in an organization choose not to be engaged in strategic projects?

**Conceptual Framework**

There are two main concepts and two specific theories related to this study. The first concept is that of the positive relationship between successful initiatives and employee
engagement. This concept is supported by Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. The second concept is a positive relationship between meeting strategic goals and organizations investing in and seeing employees as intellectual capital, which is supported by transformational leadership.

The first theory is Maslow’s Motivational Theory (Hierarchy of Needs). The second theory which aids in explaining this general problem is the transformational leadership theory. Both distinct theories show the relationship between the reason an individual would choose to participate or not participate voluntarily in assisting an organization with strategic decisions and projects. Maslow’s Motivational Theory explains what individuals consider needing first and foremost in life. Once those needs are satisfied, employees are able to reach a higher potential and exhibit greater creativity. Transformational Leadership Theory explains how leaders can provide these basic needs to employees and therefore build their employees to the point of wanting to participate in non-essential job roles such as engagement in strategy. These theories can aid in understanding if there is anything those in leadership roles within an organization can do to stimulate engagement among their employees.

Discussion of Concept 1

The first concept is the positive relationship between successful initiatives and employee engagement. A descriptor for this concept is attentive involvement. Employee engagement is necessary for effectiveness in an organization and to promote competitiveness in industry and innovative ideas (Ruck et al., 2017). There is a positive relationship noted between high-level performance and work quality of individuals who are engaged in the decision-making and goals of their organization (Bailey et al., 2015).

Maslow’s Motivational Theory (Hierarchy of Needs) expresses the levels of needs and fulfillment of individuals. These needs and fulfillment states are ranked in order of importance to
individuals with the most basic needs at the bottom base of the pyramid. As the theory suggests, there are basic needs, psychological needs, and self-fulfillment needs. For employees to achieve their highest point of self-actualization, their basic needs must be met first (Tulika & Prakash, 2016). When these basic needs are not met, employees may be overwhelmed with fear and stress. Employees fearful of their basic needs not being met portray very minimal decision-making skills (Stewart et al., 2018). Leaders in an organization should monitor employees periodically to understand if their basic needs are being fulfilled within their job (De Vito et al., 2016).

Once the basic needs of individual employees are met, such as safety and a livable wage, then leadership can focus on achieving higher levels of fulfillment which come along with creativity and participation in non-essential tasks. A need to be engaged in work activities can be driven by the idea of needing fulfillment (Green et al., 2017). Employee motivation and engagement can be increased when leaders understand that there are emotional factors that play a large role in involvement and feelings of fulfillment (Singh, 2017). Once the basic needs are met and satisfied, employees operate at a higher fulfillment level and achieve higher potential.

**Figure 1**

*Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (McLeod, 2020)*

![Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs](image)
Discussion of Concept 2

Secondly, there is a positive relationship between meeting strategic goals and organizations investing in and seeing employees as intellectual capital. A descriptor for this concept is human knowledge. Intellectual capital is how organizations can maintain a competitive advantage and successfully implement strategy (Qureshi & Ghani, 2015). Research provides evidence that companies in the declining stages have some of the lowest intellectual capital, while those succeeding and meeting goals have the highest indicators of intellectual capital (Alcalde-Delgado et al., 2020).

There is a positive correlation between transformational leadership ideas and employee engagement within nonprofit organizations (Freeborough & Patterson, 2015). The transformational leadership theory specifies the types of influence leadership may have on individuals in any organization. One dichotomy of leadership is that managing and leading are indeed two separate and different ideas. The way a leader shapes an individual and how a manager interacts with that same individual is different in that a leader can focus on the needs of the employee and not solely the work tasks performed by that individual (Ruben & Gigliotti, 2016).

Leaders in organizations can stimulate engagement through specific integrated initiatives aimed at strengthening their own goals and strategy (Donnelly, 2018). Leaders and managers can increase the engagement of employees through trust, collaboration, and empowerment (Holland, 2016). These attributes are known as authentic forms of leadership. Authentic leadership directly impacts trust in an organization and therefore impacts the work of employees (Coxen et al., 2016). As employees trust the organization and leadership, they are more likely to trust and believe in the goals and objectives of the organization.
Discussion of Relationships Between Concepts

The theories mentioned aid in explaining the relationships between leaders and employees in an organization as well as fulfillment. The research questions for this study involve the feelings and needs of employees to be involved and engaged as well as how leadership and executives can aid in that process. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs directly explains what employees value most and how to reach the highest valued fulfillment once basic needs are met. This theory explains the needs structure of individuals and how the fulfillment of those basic needs allows them to think and work at their full potential.

The transformational leadership theory is related to the impact that managers and leaders can have on the engagement of their employees. Leaders and executives in an organization can set culture or ideology for their business that allows employees a clear vision. As stated by Holland (2016), when trust is established in an organization, employees tend to believe in the goals set by leadership.

Summary of the Conceptual Framework

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory and transformational leadership theory can provide insight into the impact of the employees’ engagement in an organization. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory helps explain how an individual employee reaches higher fulfillment depending on how their basic needs are met. Transformational Leadership Theory is important in understanding the role of leadership in employee engagement. These theories provide reasoning as to why an employee would or would not engage in strategic decision-making. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory suggests that the basic needs of employees at work must be met first to allow for deep thought and higher fulfillment, while leadership theory explains the way managers and leaders can accomplish meeting those said basic needs and encouraging employee
thought. Within the conceptual framework diagram (Figure 2), the relationship between these theories and the research concepts is detailed. Information is also shown in this diagram as to how variables and actors of the study interact together with the theories and concepts to complete the framework design and ultimately relate to the strategic goals and objectives.

**Figure 2**

*Conceptual Framework Diagram*
Definition of Terms

*College Dean:* One of the highest academic positions within a secondary education institution (“The Academic Dean,” 2020).

*Community College:* A two-year higher education institution providing Associate Degrees, Diplomas, and Certificates to students in various areas of study (Kasper, 2002).

*Director:* Management level position within a community college organization who oversees staff positions (“Dean vs. Director,” 2020).

*Executives:* Individuals in charge of running an organization (Guiseppi, 2018). For this study this includes individuals in an organization above the first management level of employees. In a community college, executives are defined as the president, vice presidents, deans, and directors.

*Faculty:* Individuals in a college or university responsible for teaching, research, and service to the institution (“Faculty Roles,” 2020). For this study, faculty includes community college employees who have instruction duties.

*Initiatives:* Action focused projects which work to accomplish goals and objectives set by the organization strategy (Lucco, 2020).

*Nonprofit Organization:* An organization which “performs some type of public or community benefit, without the purpose of making a profit” (“Starting a Nonprofit,” 2019).

*Staff:* Administrative staff of the organization (Surbhi, 2016). For this study, staff consists of community college employees who do not have instruction duties.

*Stakeholders:* The “individuals and organizations who are actively involved in the project, or whose interests may be positively or negatively affected as a result of project execution or successful project completion” (Project Management Institute, 1996).
Strategic Planning: The deliberate and intentional efforts of organizations to guide the goals and objectives of that organization (Bryson et al., 2017).

Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations

This study does include various assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. There are factors out of the researcher’s control and others that can be controlled. Following are detailed explanations and elaboration of the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of this research.

Assumptions

The first assumption of this study was that the data given by employees would be truthful information. In research, there is the potential that some data collected is falsified, especially when the survey is asking questions on sensitive issues (Christofides & Perri, 2019). The information will not be detrimental to their job, and that will be explained to participants. The participant data will be kept confidential. Participation was not mandatory, and the participants asked to complete the interviews were allowed to remove their information at any time or choose not to participate.

The second assumption was that employees would want to participate in the interview or questionnaire. There was an incentive to complete an interview or the questionnaire. There was a drawing held for an Amazon gift card out of all interview participants and another drawing out of all of the questionnaire participants. It was assumed that individuals would choose to give survey data to enrich the information related to this field. Survey participation is higher when individuals feel that the research is of importance to their life (Brosnan et al., 2019).

The third assumption was that the educational institution chosen for the study was going through strategic decision-making at the time of the data collection. If the organization never worked on strategic projects or planning, the research questions would be irrelevant. It is helpful
if the organization is currently working on or has recently worked on strategic projects to ensure the experiences are fresh in the minds of the participants. If a lot of time has passed since the organization has completed strategic projects, the participants may not remember the experiences in full detail, which would impact their survey answers and the study. The data needed for this study is for one particular situation of strategic planning. As stated by Bhat (n.d.), cross-sectional surveying, which questions the individual about a specific situation, is the best option for this study. The educational institution in the study does indeed participate in strategy decisions on a regular basis which allows for confidence that this assumption is true.

**Limitations**

A potential weakness in the study was the small number of possible participants. This study was conducted in a community college in Western North Carolina. The college has an employee base that is not as large as many companies. Therefore, the information gathered was not as sizable. The sample sizes are large enough, however, to create data pools that are significant to the research and will support conclusions for the research questions. The study is qualitative, allowing for broader data gathering, which will aid in the amount of information collected per participant.

Due to the presence of COVID-19 in the United States, there was the limitation that organizations were not functioning as they would in a normal situation. This could have impeded the process of gathering data if individuals were not on-site due to the organizations having employees work from home. In order to mitigate this scenario, there was the option of virtual interviews as well as face-to-face interviews to ensure the data sample will still meet the needs of the study.
Delimitations

The study was conducted within a nonprofit organization. Nonprofit organizations are important businesses that are often overlooked by research in this field (Freeborough & Patterson, 2015). By completing the research within a nonprofit organization, it will contribute to the literature on employee engagement. Since the study was conducted within an educational institution, it included employees who (a) had a title below the dean or director level in a community college, (b) had a status of faculty or staff, and (c) were located in one community college in the state of North Carolina.

Significance of the Study

Research shows that there is low engagement of non-leadership employees in strategic decision-making. Welbourne (2007) noted that there is an overall lack of employee engagement in organizations, as well as the fact that leadership and management play a critical role in employee encouragement. This study was completed to determine if there is indeed low employee engagement in nonprofit organization decision-making and, if so, the possible reasons for the low engagement rates. The significance of this study is to aid leaders of an organization in engaging employees in strategic decisions.

Reduction of Gaps

Research data are available concerning leadership in organizations and how they can engage employees. Kamon (2016) suggested that thorough communication and new communication channels, such as multimedia communication, are ways to help engage the employee base in an organization. However, the information pool is not as large for nonprofit companies. According to Freeborough and Patterson (2015), the idea of employee engagement has been studied by many researchers but not among nonprofit organizations. Employees in
many for-profit organizations participate in additional work to move up a level or gain better opportunities (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). The motivation for those employees to be engaged is often advancement in the organization. Understanding how nonprofit employees become engaged willingly in strategic decisions will add to the existing body of knowledge on employee engagement due to the specificity of organization type.

**Implications for Biblical Integration**

The biblical perspective, or Christian worldview, of life is looking at things in accordance with God’s Word, which is known as the Bible. Those who have a relationship with Jesus Christ use this information to aid in decision-making and truth-seeking. They see the information as a guide or map for life. This is not only for spiritual journeys but also life lessons and decisions. Business is one facet included in these life decisions that can be viewed from a Christian worldview. Often, companies and organizations make decisions based on the “business” side of things and only look at their success and strategy from a monetary stance or growth. According to Wang and Murnighan (2014), economic wellbeing and the pursuit of wealth can foster unethical decision-making.

As stated in Colossians, “whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters” (Holy Bible, *New International Version*, 1978/2011, Colossians 3:23). The monetary side of business is not always the most moral or ethical viewpoint of how things should operate. Financial statements can tell us about profits but cannot tell us how decisions that have been made may impact the lives of others. By utilizing the Christian worldview along with our knowledge of business, we cannot only make sound financial decisions but also ensure that thought is being given to other aspects of life that are more impactful. This could mean the safety of employees or customers, environmental issues,
and the overall good of humanity. Therefore, conducting business from not only a business
knowledge viewpoint but also with Christian standards is very important to the overall success of
an organization.

Strategic decisions can impact the success of a business by determining what the
company has set out to accomplish. Pisano (2015) stated that the strategy of a company is a
dedication to a certain set of planned goals and objectives that everyone must work toward. The
act of planning ahead and understanding where you are going is a good start to a successful
business model (Frese et al., 2007). Scripture shows that Moses was a strategic planner. He
worked to delegate the load and led the Israelites out of Egypt. God had a plan for Moses to
manage and execute. When that plan was followed as instructed, it was shown that the goals and
objectives were indeed met.

Every organization should have goals and objectives. Nonprofit companies are set apart
from other organizations because they are not seeking profit. Financial stability is important in a
nonprofit but return on investment is not the main goal. For nonprofits to grow and function, it is
beneficial to have a strong strategy (Murphy, 2016). Strategies are developed within these
organizations to fulfill a purpose of some sort. For example, two possible organizations for this
study are places of education and places of worship. In either case, using only business
knowledge would not necessarily point these organizations in the appropriate direction when
determining strategy and whom to include in those types of decisions. Therefore, the Christian
worldview brings about another piece of knowledge that is important for nonprofit organizations.
This worldview ensures that the overall good of individuals and the world is noted in decision-
making and not just the financial or power structure of the organization itself.
Biblical perspectives such as those mentioned are not solely important for those of the Christian faith. Embracing the ideology of kindness, love, and the good of humanity should be of importance to all mankind, not only Christians. Therefore, following the principles and ideas of the biblical perspectives of business are beneficial and relevant to all businesses.

**Relationship to Field of Study**

The project management field of study encompasses many types of projects. These range from implementing new technology to something less tangible, such as a new strategy (Soderlund, 2005). Project management principles are used in both types of projects. This study was conducted to better understand the participation of employees in strategic projects, specifically in nonprofit organizations.

**Summary of the Significance of the Study**

Understanding the need for employee engagement in decision-making is important. Per Cook-Davies (2017), organizations that engage employees see greater success in their goals and objectives. Therefore, it is important to understand why employees may choose not to be engaged in strategic decisions and what leadership may be able to do to encourage engagement. This can be easier in for-profit organizations because additional workload may bring about promotions and higher pay for individuals. Employees work harder and engage more to earn something in return for the extra work (Shah et al., 2011). However, in nonprofit organizations, this could be a greater issue. Therefore, this study is being conducted to provide insight into nonprofit organization employee engagement.

**A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

A vast amount of research has been conducted in the field of strategic planning and decision-making in organizations (Wolf & Floyd, 2017). Strategic planning and projects are
modes for organizations to be successful and gain a competitive advantage (Erbas, 2019). Knowing that strategic decision-making is important in organizations has raised questions to be researched concerning the need for employee engagement in strategic planning.

To aid in answering the research questions posed, this literature review is based on various professional and academic journals and articles available on the subject of engagement in strategic planning and decision-making. Specifically, this review will gather information on the engagement of nonprofit organization employees in strategic decision-making. Along with the overall idea of strategic engagement, this review notes many variables and theories directly related to the study of engagement in strategic decision-making.

The review includes a detailed evaluation of key components and a summary of the content as a whole. Literature was examined for each individual piece of the study, including nonprofit organizations, strategic projects, employee engagement, and supporting theories. Each of these entities provides information to support and explain the research to be conducted.

**Overview of Nonprofit Organizations**

Organizations can be categorized as being nonprofit or for-profit. The idea and mission of a nonprofit organization are to improve its community and culture in some way (Gratton, 2018). Nonprofit organizations are not as concerned about the financial bottom line, which is the net profit and loss number (Mesdaghinia et al., 2019). The key difference between a for-profit and nonprofit organization is the overall mission of the company. For-profit businesses are first and foremost developed to make a monetary profit, while nonprofit organizations are first concerned with the vision of the company (Gratton, 2018).

Nonprofit organizations face challenges, such as funding, that can impact their competitive nature among the increasing number of nonprofits today (Cestari et al., 2017).
Funding sources are not solely generated by products or services produced by the organization. Nonprofit companies depend on funding from outside sources to run their business and meet their objectives (Devalkar et al., 2016). Nonprofit organizations have the challenge of balancing their service to the community and the generation of funds to operate the company (Gamble et al., 2019).

Nonprofit organizations depend on donor activity which can include anything from donations in monetary form to items such as clothing (Shehu et al., 2016). These donors must see the value in the donation in which they are providing. Encouraging donations in nonprofit organizations includes gaining and maintaining the trust of potential donors and supporters (Shehu et al., 2016).

Performance can be measured in for-profit companies by looking at the financial bottom line and revenue. This is different for a nonprofit organization due to the mission of various nonprofit organizations varying greatly as well as having no bottom line to measure profitability (Boateng et al., 2016). Other measures such as customer satisfaction and meeting mission objectives can show how strategic decisions and planning have aided these nonprofit organizations in growth or performance (Newcomer & Brass, 2015).

The number of nonprofit organizations is increasing, and there is more competition between these entities for donor funds. This causes these companies to look for ways to improve and increase their funding opportunities. In many cases, strategic planning and decision-making are ways for these organizations to gain market share and competitive advantage (Laurett & Ferreira, 2018). Strategy and strategic projects are important planning tools for nonprofit organizations as well as for-profit businesses (Rustambekov & Unni, 2017). This is due to the impact that strategic planning can have on the success and competitiveness of the organization.
The presence of strategic planning and strategic decision-making within a nonprofit organization can help the company overcome financial and funding obstacles (Gratton, 2018).

For the purpose of this study, the definition of a nonprofit from the United States government is being used. This definition is the determination criteria for the setup of any nonprofit organization in the United States. According to the United States government, a nonprofit is an organization which “performs some type of public or community benefit, without the purpose of making a profit” (USAGov, n.d.).

Organizations of potential study include educational institutions. There are other nonprofit organizations that are not planned for use in this study. Charities and medical societies are two large forms of nonprofit organizations but will not be examined in this study.

**Education Institutions.** One form of a nonprofit organization is educational institution. In particular, the study will potentially examine the community college as the educational institution being researched. Most places of higher education are considered nonprofit organizations because they are not in business to make a profit. Community colleges fall into this category. Unfortunately, much of the funding for community colleges and public institutions of higher education comes from taxes, and many older voters do not agree with a tax increase for the purpose of higher education (Brunner & Johnson, 2017). Therefore, when the government is making choices about where funding should go, community colleges are not always at the forefront. Colleges and universities often receive funding from state governments along with the tuition that is charged to each student. One form of funding is the Pell Grant, which is often allocated to approximately half of all students in a community college (McKinney & Hagedorn,
Pell Grant aid is a federal program that students receive mainly based upon family income (Park & Scott-Clayton, 2018).

Community colleges are designed as open-door institutions which welcome students who are less likely to complete their credentials (McKinney & Hagedorn, 2017). Higher education entities are recently facing a trend of performance-based funding, which allocates funds for that college based on completion rates or success rates (Kelchen, 2019). Performance-based funding examines completion rates for courses or programs, and at the community college level, these rates can be rather low due to the wide variety of academic levels of the students attending a community college (McKinney & Hagedorn, 2017).

Some challenges that community colleges may incur are external in nature. Being nonprofit, these organizations take much pressure from state and local governments due to those governments being a large source of funding for the institution (Levin et al., 2018). Therefore, these external agents who provide funding must buy-in to any strategic decision-making that is being planned in order to provide financial support for the strategy implementation.

Churches. A church is a social entity made up of people who share the same life principles and faith (Adebayo & Govender, 2020). A church is considered a nonprofit entity because its mission is to provide something valuable to the community. Therefore, for churches to obtain proper funding, the value provided to the community must generate the funding needed from individuals by attracting people who bring in offerings (Tkaczynski, 2017).

The First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America creates a wall between religious entities and government (S.M., 2016). Unlike educational institutions, funding for the operation of religious entities does not come from the government. Most churches of the
Protestant faith practice tithing of income as a mode of funding for the nonprofit organization ("Most Protestant Churchgoers,” 2018).

**Other.** One of the two nonprofit entities mentioned above is planned to be the focal point of this study. However, there are many other types of nonprofit organizations that are not being detailed in this review. Nonprofits are those organizations known to "act as stewards of the public interest" (Langer & LeRoux, 2017, p. 457). Today many health organizations and other fundraising companies are considered nonprofit entities. These may include companies in the arts, culture and humanities, education and research, environment, health, human services, relief organizations, public and societal benefit, and religion (GuideStar, 2020).

**Overview of Strategic Decision-making**

Strategic planning and mapping are ideas that are important to for-profit and nonprofit organizations alike. Any company that has a mission to grow and succeed in a given market should prioritize strategic decisions. Strategic planning includes gathering information and creating a plan to understand what the company intends to provide to customers, where the organization is going, and how they plan to get to that point (Aithal, 2015). These thoughts mentioned bringing the company to particular objectives and goals that become the culture of the organization (Kabeyi, 2019).

For strategic changes to be implemented, there are actions and steps of deployment that must be taken (Aithal, 2015). In using higher education as an example, this organization must strive to achieve its own objectives, goals, and mission while also meeting the needs of its customers, which are students. This shows the importance of all stakeholders in an organization being part of and understanding the objectives of the plan. Value must be realized by all parties to ensure future loyalty to the organization and its objectives.
Another definition of strategy is deciding and making choices to "ensure a sustainable competitive advantage" (Anwar et al., 2016, p. 99). Due to the increasing competitiveness of the business world, it is extremely important that organizations decide and agree on their own strategy and clearly understand the direction in which their company plans to go (Ferreira et al., 2019). Moving forward and innovative thinking is important for nonprofit organizations in order to stay competitive (Jaskyte, 2015). Staying in business is a priority for any company. Therefore, strategic planning is not only about determining goals and objectives, but also setting priorities to the tasks to be completed (Kabeyi, 2019).

Since strategic planning and decision-making has a positive relationship to an organization’s performance (George et al., 2019), all organizations should place priority on their plan and the revisiting and measuring of their objectives. Not only does strategic planning and implementation keep a business alive, but it is also a crucial part of the growth of an organization (Arend et al., 2015).

As the literature shows the importance of strategic planning, organizations must place time and effort into creating a plan in the most efficient and effective manner. For a strategic plan to be effective and successful, traits such as leadership, communication, and proper assessment are needed (Nauffal & Nasser, 2012). Individuals who possess these traits are assets to the successful implementation of the project. The human side of strategic planning and decision-making is as important as the plan itself. If the human aspect of strategic planning is ignored, the entire strategic process could fail (Aquino, 2013).

Once an organization has developed a plan, the outcome may be the implementation of one type of project or a group of projects varying in type. Strategic projects and decisions can be small in nature or very large, consisting of much time and cost associated. Particular types of a
strategic project to be discussed include technology, business process improvement (BPI), yearly planning and budgeting, objective setting, and rebranding.

**Technology.** Nonprofit organizations are just beginning to understand the importance of Information Technology projects in their strategic planning and the impact that Information Technology has on securing funds for the company (Gratton, 2018). Technology can be used as an asset when planning strategic objectives and pathways. Adding technology in an organization often is completed to gain a competitive advantage in some way (Coman, 2018). One example of this is companies who introduce cloud computing to execute activities that their organization may not be able to do with the information technology structure available to them in-house (Palos-Sanchez et al., 2017).

One issue with Information Technology projects is the success rate (Engelbrecht et al., 2017). When organizations begin technology projects, it is important for those projects to be based on very sound ideas and business topics (Einhorn et al., 2019). Without keeping the business case at the forefront throughout the entire project, the potential for negative outcomes increases.

Organizations today face a lot of competition. In turn, many of those companies plan new and innovative information systems to aid in achieving a competitive advantage. Doing so means that the organization must not only concentrate on their information technology infrastructure but also ensure that they are aligning their business goals and strategy with their information system strategy (Newkirk et al., 2017). It is argued that technology and innovation are not encouraged when organizations are determining long-term strategies (Arend et al., 2015). However, technology and innovation can help an organization achieve business goals if the innovation focuses on the organization’s objectives (Newkirk et al., 2017).
Another way that technology projects aid in strategic planning is through research and development. As stated, companies today are faced with much competition. One way for those organizations to stay competitive is to place innovation and research and development as top priorities (Kyung, 2018). Within the realm of research and development, technology is often of great importance (Cho et al., 2016).

Implementing technology projects and strategies can bring about challenges, including changes in the market in which the organization operates (Ferreira et al., 2019). For organizations to be successful when implementing new technology or strategic projects, they must be ready to manage change (Stouten et al., 2018). By adding technology and new innovative processes, the result many times is that a company must adjust current business processes and policies for the technology to be most effective (Jiang et al., 2018).

**Business Process Improvement.** For many organizations to be innovative and move forward in competitiveness, there must be change, as with the before mentioned technology projects. These changes should be beneficial in making the organization more efficient and/or effective. One way organizations change their path is through business process improvement (BPI). BPI consists of projects (mostly strategic in nature) which set out to update current business processes and gain competitive advantage (Ibrahim et al., 2019). This may include technology changes or possibly only updating in-house manual processes to become more efficient (Vanwersch et al., 2016).

BPI projects open opportunities for success and innovation in the competitive market (Ibrahim et al., 2019). There are many organizations competing for the same customers in a particular market. BPI improves performance across many areas in an organization to gain
effectiveness and efficiency in processes and therefore creates a competitive advantage (Ibrahim et al., 2019).

Demanding customers and the spread of globalization in business are two reasons for the need for BPI projects (Bakotic & Krnic, 2017). These types of projects are important for competitiveness and success. Therefore, BPI projects have become important initiatives in organizations and are part of planning decisions made in the company (Bakotic & Krnic, 2017).

By implementing BPI projects, organizations see positive effects on their performance, and objectives and goals are more easily achieved (Lehnert et al., 2017). Performance is important to organizations of all sizes. Therefore, there is ample availability of research concerning BPI. The reason for the vast amount of research is because improving the efficiency and/or effectiveness of an organization by improving processes can improve the overall company and the bottom line (Lohrmann & Reichert, 2016).

One major type of BPI is Lean Six Sigma practices. The Lean Six Sigma process is one that promotes lean thinking where the value of processes is determined with the intent of eliminating waste (Antony et al., 2017). Lean Six Sigma practices are most relevant and exist mainly in large operations and, specifically, manufacturing companies (Antony et al., 2019). In these organizations, the Lean Six Sigma approach searches for defects or mistakes and eliminates the causes of those defects to improve customer satisfaction and the effectiveness of the organization (Antony et al., 2017).

**Yearly Planning.** Strategic planning is mostly recognized as being long-term in nature but can also be short-term. Organizations develop major goals and objectives for long-term purposes, such as within 5 to 10 years, but often evaluate those goals on a much shorter timeframe, such as a yearly or even quarterly review (Towbin et al., 2018). Not only is setting
the goals up-front a major process, but so is the constant review and measurement of progress. A yearly review of goals and objectives is a way for employees to make certain their daily activities are still related to the organization’s overall mission (Towbin et al., 2018).

Things may change in the business market very quickly. It is known that the economy, the environment, the government, and other forces may change markets at any given time. All of these external forces are reasons that organizations must revisit their strategy not only in long-term time spans but much shorter timeframes to ensure these outside forces have not caused a needed shift in their strategic objectives (Ramirez et al., 2017). The idea behind this approach is coping with change. Ramirez et al. (2017) suggested that organizations will have outside forces creating change. It is important for organizations to know how to adapt their processes to those changes in a timely manner.

**Objective Setting.** Strategic planning is the act of making decisions and planning actions that guide the organization in company objectives, such as what they plan to accomplish and how they plan to do so (Bryson et al., 2017). Setting goals and overall organization objectives is another part of strategic planning. One way to accomplish this is by using road mapping, which is a long-term look at the company and how it plans to move forward in the future (Vishnevskiy et al., 2016). When setting goals and objectives in strategic planning, the organization should consider its overall mission and vision and ensure the goals and objectives line up with the stated culture of the company (George et al., 2019).

By setting strategic objectives, leadership in an organization can minimize uncertainties and forecast changes and potential hurdles before being faced with them directly (Elbanna et al., 2015). Internal and external variables of the organization can be studied to determine how the organization can move forward and eliminate as much uncertainty as possible. This can be done
using a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis. Understanding the current business environment and the other forces affecting that environment is critical in strategic planning (Phadermrod et al., 2019). SWOT analysis is one way to determine how an organization establishes goals and objectives within strategic planning (Abdel-Basset et al., 2018).

Goals and objectives, in general, should use a clear structure that is easily understood by all stakeholders in the organization (Ogbeiri, 2017). As with any goals, strategic goals should follow the SMART criteria as being specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-constrained (Oleksandra et al., 2019). Having SMART objectives allows the strategic planning groups to understand their action plan and be able to measure and track their success. Although it is important for all objectives to be SMART, one main goal is that they are achievable. Many strategic plans are very large in what they are trying to accomplish. There must be a point at which the planning group determines a true stopping point to be able to achieve their goal and feel a sense of accomplishment (Perlmutter, 2019).

**Rebranding.** Maintaining an appropriate and favorable brand image is important to stakeholders in an organization (Lee & Gregg, 2017). The brand of an organization is often the outcome of strategic decisions that have been made as to the objectives of the organization (Stuart, 2018). Many nonprofit organizations must rebrand and change their strategy to be competitive in the nonprofit market (Lee & Bourne, 2017). For example, in the case of educational institutions, it is important that the brand of the school relates to a very diverse
population of individuals to gain their support and increase the student population (Lee & Gregg, 2017).

Rebranding is a company moving away from its initial stated mission. When mentioning nonprofit organizations, they tend to brand their new alignment toward the needs of their customers more so than that of the original mission of the organization in order to gain market share and for customers to like their organization in order to continue receiving financial support (Lee & Bourne, 2017). The opposite of this is also true. If an organization is primarily funded by government or other static sources, they are less likely to change their path and remain focused on their original organization mission and goals (Lee & Bourne, 2017).

Rebranding can be a very large step for an organization, especially for nonprofit companies. In some cases, organizations are working toward large changes. Rebranding is one type of strategic planning that allows an organization to shift its goals and objectives and move the company into a direction in which it has not been going (VanCamp, 2017).

Rebranding is important in a nonprofit organization but is often overlooked due to the cost and time needed for proper rebranding (Venzin, 2018). Support from the board is essential in the success of the rebranding process. The board must understand the importance of the plan and how the rebranding will enhance the future of the organization in order to agree to fund the strategic process (Venzin, 2018).

**Overview of Employee Engagement**

Employee engagement is a topic that many organizations explore and try to improve on for the betterment of their company. Literature suggests that "engagement is the opposite of burnout" (Gupta, 2017, p. 103). Engagement is a positive trait in an employee rather than a negative feeling. However, there is a difference between an employee who is just happy and one
that is engaged in their work and organization. Those who are engaged are doing their daily tasks not only for payment but also for the greater good of the company and being part of the solution to meeting objectives and goals (Eaglebarger, 2017).

Being proactive about strategic planning is important to employee productivity and engagement (Strobel et al., 2017). It is understood from the literature that strategic planning and objective setting are crucial to the success of an organization. The same is true concerning employee engagement. Being proactive about strategic planning ensures the organization understands the environment and forces acting on that organization. This also allows for the organization to engage in succession planning to increase employee productivity, engagement, and work satisfaction (Strobel et al., 2017). Organizations that plan on ensuring employees have adequate resources and are satisfied in their work environment tend to increase employee engagement (Knight et al., 2016).

Organizations are constantly trying to determine how to increase profits and drive down costs, and one way is through employee productivity. It is proven that there is a positive relationship between employee engagement and employee performance (Sendawula et al., 2018). Organizations that place importance on employee engagement and motivation may see that their company is strengthened and customer value is increased (Popli & Rizvi, 2017). Engagement also decreases negative impacts in the organization as well. Increases in employee engagement create a decline in attrition and increase innovation in an organization (Chandani et al., 2016).

Engaging everyone in an organization when planning can contribute to the growth and development of the company's goals and objectives (Peralta, 2017). This can be difficult when organizations do not structure their culture to encourage participation by all parties. Therefore, companies must recognize how each person in an organization is connected not only to each
other but to the overarching objectives in order to achieve true employee engagement (Peralta, 2017).

The task at hand is to better understand what encourages or discourages this needed engagement. Employee engagement is not something that only the employee is responsible for, but it is a two-way relationship with leaders in the organization as well (Milhem et al., 2019). The overall working conditions and the way employees are treated are two specific items that leaders and managers control that can impact employee engagement (Pandey et al., 2020). Organizations must understand the benefits of engagement and implement approaches from the leadership and employee side to encourage and increase this engagement.

Nelson (2017) suggested that there are six different approaches to increase engagement, including clear direction, good communication, involving employees in decisions, increasing employee flexibility, developing teams and communities, and rewarding good performance. Clear direction is important because employees need to understand the long-term interests of the organization in order to establish buy-in (Polman & Bhattacharya, 2016). For these directions to be clear will require good communication from all levels of the organization. Good communication within an organization strengthens employee engagement and how the employees portray the company to those outside the organization (Kang & Sung, 2017).

Empowering employees to aid in decision-making is not apparent in all organizations (Tohidian & Abbaspour, 2020). If organizations see a positive outcome when including employees in decisions, they will likely be more willing to add that as part of their culture. Tian and Zhai (2019) found that decisions made by both employees and management increases overall organization profitability. This will encourage management to include employees in decisions being made.
Employee flexibility is important to many individuals. Flexibility may be viewed as more of a “deeper psychological contract” between employees and their place of work (Canibano, 2018, p. 1). Employees are now looking for workplace flexibility, and many organizations are offering flexible opportunities (Conradie & de Klerk, 2019). This increase in flexibility allows the employee to make their own decisions about working arrangements and can encourage work-life balance (Canibano, 2018).

People like to be part of a greater culture or community. Organizations must work to make their employees feel a sense of belonging and community, which in turn establishes a commitment to the company and its objectives (Gupta, 2017). Connections are made between employees and the organization, which generate a higher engagement level and commitment to a perceived culture (Al Mehrzi & Singh, 2016). One way in which organizations are accomplishing the idea of community and unity within the workforce is through the use of internal social media (Ewing et al., 2019).

The idea of rewards can be encouraging, whether those rewards are large or small. Recognition programs do not always have to be monetary. Organizations are finding that individuals do not necessarily expect monetary compensation as recognition but appreciate other forms of praise and recognition that encourage purpose and motivation (Irvine, 2013).

Much of the workforce in business is currently transitioning from the Baby Boomer generation to Millennials. Millennials are motivated by organizations that provide a clear vision, encourage learning, communicate well, allow for collaboration, have diverse work groups, provide feedback, offer workplace flexibility, provide clear leadership, and have good ethical work practices (Holmberg-Wright et al., 2017). These things motivate Millennials to maximize
their productivity and engagement in the organization, creating opportunities rather than the obstacles that have been stereotypical of the Millennial generation (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010).

Overall, employee engagement is a broad topic. It can be encouraged by management in many ways or could be part of an individual’s personality to succeed. Knowing that an employee’s personality can alter how they become engaged in their own work is important, but so is understanding the different ways in which various organizations are able to encourage their employees. Nonprofit and for-profit organizations do differ in their abilities to offer compensation and rewards to their employees.

**Employee Engagement in Nonprofit Organizations.** Non-intrinsic material-based motivation is meaningful and liked by all employees, including those who work in a for-profit or nonprofit setting; however, this type of motivation is not always available for those in a nonprofit organization (Chen & Bozeman, 2012). Nonprofit companies typically have limited external rewards available for their employees. They do not have lingering funds to always motivate employees financially (Chen & Bozeman, 2012).

What is good for many nonprofit organizations is that their employees may not place all their concerns with financial or monetary reward systems (Renard & Snelgar, 2016). Many individuals who work in the nonprofit realm of business are engaged with their work because they have a sense of belonging to the community they serve and are committed to making a difference (Peralta, 2017). These individuals may also be engaged in their work and look for opportunities to participate in strategic planning when others need to be approached (Gratton, 2018).

The main idea is that not all employees are looking for financial encouragement but are working and engaging for a purpose. Employees in nonprofit organizations exude unique
characteristics when discussing recognition in that their motivation comes from the opportunity to be a part of an organization and help to achieve organizational goals based on their values and intrinsic rewards (Akingbola & van den Berg, 2016). Socially responsible organizations are one example of potential employee motivation. Tian and Robertson (2019) stated that if an employee senses that the company they work for is socially responsible, employee performance improves, and more engagement occurs.

**Employee Engagement in For-Profit Organizations.** For-profit organizations motivate employees in various ways. Most motivational tactics in for-profit organizations are recognized as extrinsic tangible rewards such as monetary compensation and benefits (Renard & Snelgar, 2016). They are able to motivate in this manner because of their cash flow, which is not always the case for nonprofits.

For-profit companies and their boards look for a healthy financial bottom line which includes minimizing expenses. Personnel costs are one of the highest expenses in many organizations (Lundy, 2019). However, the employees of a company are critical to its success. One way to minimize personnel expense is to hire the correct employees and get them engaged in the goals and objectives of the organization, causing them to enjoy their work and stay long-term with the organization (Lundy, 2019).

There exists a positive relationship between the growth of an individual and engagement because as employees are satisfied with their career goals and aspirations, they are more likely to be more loyal and committed to the organization (Karsan, 2011). This could include career goals such as recognition, promotions, and monetary gain. These extrinsic rewards are ways in which the employer prevents the employee from beginning to think about leaving the company (Khan et al., 2017).
Motivating Employees to be Engaged in Strategy. Motivating employees to be engaged in strategic planning and decision-making can be challenging. Abbah (2014) stated that for organizations to be successful in meeting goals and objectives, they must motivate their employees enough so that the value is greater than the burden on the employee. There are some ways in which motivation is accomplished. One way to enhance motivation is through implementing business process improvement (BPI) projects. Implementation of BPI projects leads to overall better employee performance and motivation in the workplace (Bakotic & Krnic, 2017).

Communication is a key factor of success in relationships and business. Being able to clearly communicate strategic plans and objectives to everyone in an organization increases the motivation and engagement of employees (Lundy, 2019). Communication is a two-way action and not only requires communication of leadership to employees but also employees to leadership. Throughout the strategic planning process, all those involved should feel that their communication and ideas are meaningful and supported (Perlmutter, 2019). Managers who create a supportive culture and encourage leadership to be caring for their employees increase the engagement of those employees (Othman & Mahmood, 2019).

Differences in Motivation. Two types of employee motivation are present in organizations today, which include intrinsic and non-intrinsic or extrinsic (Chen & Bozeman, 2012). Both are ways in which employees may be encouraged to engage in their organization and work duties. Organizations differ in the type of motivation they use many times depending on the status of nonprofit or for-profit.

The intrinsic motivation is mainly psychological in nature, and the non-intrinsic is more materialistic based (Renard & Snelgar, 2016). For-profit organizations tend to motivate based on
more non-intrinsic methods, and nonprofit organizations tend to attempt motivating employees with intrinsic rewards, which are more psychological in nature (Renard & Snelgar, 2016).

*Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.* Today, employees strive to find work that enhances their personal growth and needs (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2016). Understanding Maslow's hierarchy of needs can aid leaders in an organization realize how to take employees from just doing their job to a successful employee helping the company reach their overall goals and objectives (Phillips, 2018). Maslow's theory includes five levels of needs which begin at the bottom of a pyramid diagram and move up the pyramid as each lower stage is satisfied (Maslow, 1943). This theory provides evidence that individuals are not just motivated and satisfied by consuming goods but are creatures who find contentment in various life needs (Etzioni, 2017).

For needs to be expressed by individuals, prior needs within the hierarchy must be met first (Healy, 2016). However, the prior need may not need to be met completely, but at least in part to move to the next level (Hopper, 2020). Needs can also be met simultaneously. In this event, by doing one action, such as enjoying a meal with a friend, the individual is meeting not only their physiological need of hunger satisfaction but also their need for belonging (Hopper, 2020).

The physiological stage of the hierarchy is considered to be the critical needs of the individual that, when not met, can put life at risk (Phillips, 2018). This includes the bare necessities of life survival. Some examples include food, water, warmth, and rest (McLeod, 2020). When these specific needs are not met, it is difficult for the individual to concentrate and focus in other areas (Hopper, 2020).
The safety stage is concerned with the individual feeling safe in their environment (Phillips, 2018). The safety stage includes a sense of safety and security for the individual (McLeod, 2020). In business organizations, this stage can be aided by good working conditions. The third tier of Maslow's hierarchy is belongingness which includes being loved and other social activities such as teamwork in an organization (Alajmi & Alasousi, 2019). This stage is part of the psychological needs of individuals. It includes personal relationships and friendships (McLeod, 2020). When these conditions are met, physical health can be improved (Hopper, 2020).

The esteem level of the hierarchy is about self-confidence, and individuals who reach this stage in the process provide good quality work because they do not have to spend time being concerned about their very basic needs being met (Phillips, 2018). This is also a level, which is included in the overarching psychological needs of individuals. This includes feelings of stature and accomplishment (McLeod, 2020).

Finally, self-actualization is the final tier in Maslow's hierarchy and includes traits such as creativity and self-fulfillment (Alajmi & Alasousi, 2019). This final level provides self-fulfillment. The self-actualization tier is the maximum point for an individual’s full potential and is the tier in which creativity flourishes (McLeod, 2020).

Some organizations concentrate on only the lower level of needs which would include wages. These organizations are not concerned with the higher levels within the hierarchy, and the employee base would not have high retention and satisfaction (Stewart et al., 2018). This means that engagement would be low, and employees realize that they are quickly replaceable. The organization has an advantage over employees in this situation because the employees depend on their income for survival (Stewart et al., 2018).
It is stated by Stewart et al. (2018) that compensation with wages and material items can satisfy the lower-level needs in the hierarchy but combined with emotional compensation, employees are able to reach the higher levels of the hierarchy, including esteem and self-actualization. Organizations can give employees both material and emotional rewards, which satisfies not only one level within the hierarchy, but many (Stewart et al., 2018). This creates a worker who is happy. A happy worker is more productive in the workplace, which means employers should strive to make their employees satisfied (Stewart et al., 2018). Work not only satisfies monetary and security needs but also needs higher on the pyramid of Maslow's theory (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2016).

**Leadership Theory.** Transformational leadership theory is an integral part of how many education institutions operate (Berkovich, 2016). Transformational leadership works to create a sense of motivation in employees in a coach/coachee relationship with leaders in the organization (Nikolova et al., 2019). The goal of transformational leadership is that leaders can transform their employees to be more motivated and engaged in order to accomplish the common goals of the organization (Siangchokyoo et al., 2020).

Leaders who are engaged in an organization can foster ideas of motivation and support to their employees, which in turn creates employees who enjoy their job and are engaged in the organization (Nikolova et al., 2019). Transformational leaders increase engagement in their employees by supporting their needs and encouraging them to challenge norms (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). Transformational leaders tend to exhibit traits of being "agreeable, extraverted, open, and conscientious" (Hansbrough & Schyns, 2018, p. 30).

These leaders also recognize the importance of human capital. One goal of transformational leadership is for the leader to ensure their employees understand the worth and
value that they add to the organization (Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016). This ensures the employee can see how their work impacts the objectives and goals of the company.

Ensuring that the human capital of the company is engaged is one way to increase the productivity of the employees and the competitive advantage the organization may gain in their given market (Milhem et al., 2019). Leadership plays a large part in engaging the human capital of the organization. Leadership in an organization that encourages working toward common goals and motivating employees increases the confidence and performance of the employees (Popli & Rizvi, 2016). Also, leaders who establish relationships and bonds with their employees tend to see better employee engagement and increased profits (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). All of these items work to motivate and engage the employees of the company.

In order to impact employees with transformational leadership, the leaders must buy in to the process. These leaders are genuinely interested in the outcome of their leadership and strive to see involved and engaged employees (Gilbert & Kelloway, 2018). Their leadership style is developed by their goals in the position of leader.

**Need for Employee Engagement.** Decision-making in an organization is not the job of one particular group. Tian and Zhai (2019) stated that decision-making by employees and management together is positively related to enhanced performance in the organization. The opposite is also true. When decisions are made solely by management or solely by employees, the impact of those decisions does not enhance productivity in as great of a manner and in some cases, fails to impact productivity at all (Tian & Zhai, 2019).

An example of the need for employee engagement is seen in higher education institutions. For continuous competitiveness in higher education, it is imperative that these organizations retain and develop their employees to establish engagement (Nazir & Islam, 2017).
Analysis confirms that the more employees are engaged in their organization, the more they choose to participate in extra roles in the organization and increases their performance in current roles (Reijseger et al., 2017).

Employees must be able to handle change. Strategic planning and decision-making are processes that could encourage change (Kunisch et al., 2017). When change is occurring for employees in an organization, it is more productive to involve those internal stakeholders in the planning of the changes to gain buy-in and decrease animosity (Chad, 2015). Organizations look for employees who are adaptable to changing environments in the company as well as challenges that may arise (Milhem et al., 2019).

Organizations understand the importance of employee engagement among all ranks in the company. Investing in the engagement of human capital means increased productivity for the entire organization and the long-term stability of the workforce. It is most helpful when the human capital is engaged because engaged employees are happier and even perform better in the workplace (Byrne & MacDonagh, 2017). Not only does their performance improve, but so do their efforts. Engaged employees are more likely to participate in extra responsibilities than are employees who are not engaged (Reijseger et al., 2017).

The impact of low employee engagement can be detrimental to an organization. Low engagement may cause employees' work performance to decline as well as employee overall well-being to decrease (Knight et al., 2016). When employees' well-being decreases, their work is affected in a negative manner.

**Need for Engagement in Everyday Job Duties.** Employees in an organization can be engaged in various ways. Engagement in strategic planning and decision-making is important, but so is engagement in an employee’s everyday work. Work performance increases in everyday
job duties as well as in strategic projects when companies invest efforts into their high-performing employees (Othman & Mahmood, 2019). As stated by Mann and Harter (2016), employee engagement is not something that employees should have to think of as another task, but part of the overall culture and how they achieve their daily tasks.

Personality can play a part in the engagement of an employee. Personalities differ among employees and can impact their willingness to be engaged in their work. Employees who exhibit traits of extraversion and conscientiousness are most effective in being engaged in their job duties and organization (Young et al., 2018). These employees are also less counterproductive in their work (Reijseger et al., 2017).

The business world is competitive. In order to obtain a competitive advantage in a market, an organization must work to ensure they hire employees who continuously strive to improve their performance and efficiency in their job duties (Chaudhry et al., 2017). As job duties change and innovation occurs, employees must gain the needed skills to successfully do their work. The organization can aid in this task by providing adequate training and development when needed and in turn this enhances the work level of the individuals and increases engagement in job duties (Chaudhry et al., 2017). As employees are trained and feel as they provide value, their engagement level increases. Training is completed to improve employee performance but also improves the attitude, behavior and working skills of the employee (Chaudhry et al., 2017).

Another impacting factor of employee engagement in their job duties is that of the workplace environment. A good workplace environment increases worker satisfaction, longevity with the company, and overall engagement (Chaudhry et al., 2017). In turn this overall engagement is strongly related to organization performance as a whole. Without the workforce
being engaged, there is a negative impact on the performance of the organization (Chaudhry et al., 2017).

**Need for Engagement in Strategic Decision-making.** Engaged employees are important to strategic decision-making. These individuals bring innovation and new ideas and can aid in determining opportunities and threats to the organization not recognized by leadership (Strobel et al., 2017). Various leadership positions and individuals are needed to experience effective strategic decision-making in an organization (Bryson et al., 2017). The process of strategic planning can be enhanced and improved by having broad participation within the organization (Bryson et al., 2017). This creates buy-in among the employees and strengthens their commitment to the overall objectives. Specifically, social support and adequate resources are two items that have a positive impact on employee engagement (Nazir & Islam, 2017).

Once again, higher education is a business segment that can easily show a need for all employee engagement. All decision-makers in higher education have at least one thing in common, which is they were at some point students. Therefore, it is important to include all these individuals in the decision-making process because each of their personal experiences has shaped their ideas and opinions on how education institutions can help the customer or student (McLaughlin et al., 2016).

There are negative impacts to strategy when employees from all levels are not engaged in the decisions. The worst decision-making in strategy planning occurs when managers ignore internal warnings, miss shifts in the industry, and lack forward-thinking (Power & Mitra, 2016). Note that each of these included managers only in the decision-making process. By ensuring that employees at all levels are included in these decisions, some of the risks are mitigated. Decision-
making at a leadership level only can result in incomplete decision-making processes (Power & Mitra, 2016).

**Employee Engagement Gaps.** Even though it is evident that employees should be engaged in their daily duties as well as strategic decisions, it is not always seen in organizations. There are gaps between knowing and understanding that employees should be engaged and actually accomplishing that task. Employees face challenges in the workplace that inhibit them from engaging, such as resisting change, inadequate skill set, and no direction communicated (Tucker, 2017).

Another gap to mention is the communication gap. Many times, in business, it is thought that needed information will filter down from top management to individual employees. However, this is not always true and leads to bad communication or no communication (Lowry, 2016). When there is no communication or very little communication, employees may not understand the full objectives and goals that they should be working toward. This could cause the strategic plans to fail. Strategic initiatives can fail early on in the process if the impression of the plan is that it is a top-down only approach and there is no communication to employees and no input requested other than from management (Perlmutter, 2019).

Lastly, employees may face challenges in the workplace in their own job duties or with other individuals. The increased engagement of these employees who face challenges is not the responsibility of one individual. The efforts of human resources, leadership, management, and the employees themselves are needed to face these challenges and become more engaged (Tucker, 2017).
Lack of Employee Engagement in Organizations

Engagement in organizations was very low around the year 2013 (Glavas, 2016). However, the trend has changed. According to Harter (2020), employee engagement has risen to over 30% but has been impacted by recent social changes in the United States. The engagement levels of individuals have been trending up, however, there is evidence that recent events have caused the number to fluctuate.

There is also a "counter-trend" that is being implemented in businesses around the world. The trend is corporate social responsibility (CSR), which increases engagement among employees when embedded in the culture of the company (Glavas, 2016). CSR is one avenue proposed as being a path to engaging employees in a low-level employee-engaged organization (Glavas, 2016).

Many scholars have indicated that one main business issue is the low level of engagement of employees at work (Motyka, 2018). An employee’s lack of engagement could cause a negative impact to work performance and the well-being of the employee (Knight et al., 2016). Negative work performance decreases the productivity of the organization. An example of a reason why employees may have a serious lack of engagement is the lack of security they feel in their job stability. Low engagement of employees is present in some organizations due to the employees resenting the fact that some jobs have moved to other countries and workers who work for a lower wage (Milhem et al., 2019).

When high potential employees feel irrelevant in decision-making within their organization, this may lead to continued disengagement (Othman & Mahmood, 2019). Employees have become used to continually switching jobs and turnover in organizations has
become a notable issue (Al Mamun & Hasan, 2017). High employee turnover rate and attrition causes organizations to have fewer engaged employees (Chandani et al., 2016).

Organizations look for employees who have needed skill sets as well as those who they see as long-term investments. When an organization has the ability to manage relationships well among employees, sustain a workforce, and encourage engagement, there is a positive relationship to the long-term competitive advantage (Motyka, 2018). Therefore, a lack of employee engagement can negatively impact a business. Maintaining skilled employees and ensuring those employees are satisfied ultimately creates success for the organization (Motyka, 2018).

There are different types of interventions within engagement activities. One focuses on the attributes of the employee and the other focuses on how the organization can aid in increasing engagement. An individual’s attitude and positive attributes, including optimism, can increase an individual’s ability to meet their job demands and satisfy their needs and goals in their work (Knight et al., 2016). Not all individuals possess these traits. Those individuals may need further assistance to establish engagement in their work.

The second type of intervention is placed on the organization. Individuals who do not possess the traits of positivity and easily understand their purpose in their work may need intervention from the work environment, which may include resources, social support, and even feedback from management (Knight et al., 2016). In doing this, there is a culture established where individuals do not mind seeking help when needed.

Leadership is yet another intervention. This includes the monitoring and building of skills and increasing the worker’s idea of their importance in the workforce (Knight et al., 2016).
When the worker’s skill base is improved, so is their confidence and the perceived value of their job duties.

Lastly, health intervention is a way of encouraging engagement indirectly. Promoting healthy lifestyles and stress management within an organization can improve worker efficiency and increase their satisfaction in their job (Knight et al., 2016). In turn, this satisfaction increases their engagement in the organization.

**Lack of Engagement in Strategic Decision-making.** Employees in nonprofit organizations must see the need for the changes proposed in order to buy-in to those changes. Otherwise, the employees will not engage in the implementation of the objectives set. Employees in a nonprofit organization realize the tight funding. If they do not know the importance of the strategic decisions, the cost of those decisions may seem to outweigh the need for the strategic planning and therefore create a lack of participation and support of employees (Chad, 2015).

A religious entity such as a church can present good examples of a lack of engagement in decision-making. In many small to mid-size churches, a large number of attendees perform some type of leadership role in the church (Tkaczynski, 2017). Individuals understand the value of various ministries in a church differently depending on their leadership role within the organization (Tkaczynski, 2017). Individuals who have a larger leadership role are more concerned with the things that impact the long-term plan for the church, while those with no leadership role are more concerned with the week-to-week information and services the church provides them (Tkaczynski, 2017).

Lack of employee engagement creates a negative work environment and costs businesses money in lost productivity every year (Slezak, 2020). Even if an organization is nonprofit, their goal is to reduce costs to the organization, not incur additional costs. Organizations must
recognize the benefits of engaged employees and explore additional training opportunities to alleviate some of the lost productivity costs (Slezak, 2020).

Employees may have a lack of engagement due to the way their job performance is measured and handled. Organizations must measure performance, however, how those measures are addressed with the employees affects the outlook of the individuals being measured. Some organizations see methods such as internal competition and resolution of control as ways to positively influence engagement when addressing performance measures and trying to improve those measures (Smith & Bititci, 2017).

**Relevance to This Study.** This study is about a lack of employee engagement in strategic decision-making. Understanding the underlying reason businesses operate is important. For-profit organizations work toward making a profit and nonprofit organizations work for a specific purpose. Productivity is key in both scenarios. Organizations with more engaged employees result in higher productivity (Chandani et al., 2016). Therefore, this information is all related because a lack of employee engagement can cause a loss in productivity which is an expense for an organization (Nelson, 2017).

**Themes Discovered**

In this study, there were six main themes that emerged from the data analysis. These themes include participation requests, culture of care, motivation and employee relations, levels of empowerment, time constraints, and absence of knowledge. Each of these themes was touched on in the literature already stated. However, additional detail is provided on these specifically.

**Participation Requests.** Of many corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities, that of employee volunteering (EV) has become of great interest in academics and in organizations (Sekar & Dyaram, 2020). Understanding and being able to utilize employees in volunteer
situations is important in strategic projects and non-profit organizations. Leadership and organizational support play a major part in the willingness of employees to participate in CSR activities. Per Sekar and Dyaram (2020), the willingness of employees to participate in such CSR activities is very significantly related to organizational support. In this same study, Sekar and Dyaram (2020) stated that when individuals are engaged during the early beginnings of activity that their ties with that program are strengthened.

The act of leadership is important not only in individuals but also in groups and goals within an organization (Ying et al., 2020). As leaders encourage employees in an organization, there is a sense of empowerment. Empowerment is a positive result of servant leadership style and empowerment is positively related to employee participation (Ying et al., 2020). Employees have intrinsic value for leaders whom they see leading by example. The more a leader exudes this leadership style, the more motivated employees tend to be (Ying et al., 2020). In turn, when requested to participate in something, an employee is more likely to do so if they have this motivation from their leadership.

Another leadership style that motivates employees is soft leadership. This leadership style leads through people skills and soft skills and is a persuasive and motivating style (Rao, 2013). These types of leaders are example-setting individuals. Therefore, when they request an employee to go above and beyond, the employee sees the leadership that has been modeled and is persuaded to participate. Each of these leadership styles provides persuasion and motivation for employees.

Culture of Care. When individuals feel as though they are cared about, this makes it more likely for that individual to trust the caregiver (Louis & Murphy, 2016). In particular, leadership in an organization promotes a caring culture and trusting culture when they show that
they care for their employees. Employees who value their culture and who are cared for tend to care for their organization and their enhancement in the organization is increased (Sekar & Dyaram, 2020).

An employee’s perception of corporate social responsibility can affect engagement. When employees value the culture of their organization and have high regard for corporate social responsibility, their engagement level is increased, and organizational pride is established (Jia et al., 2019). Organizational pride creates intrinsic motivation for the employee. The level of motivation due to organizational pride will vary, however, from employee to employee (Jia et al., 2019).

Organizational culture influences employees and their willingness to make decisions and be engaged. A caring culture of an organization includes five different dimensions. When these dimensions are present in an organization, there is a positive correlation to employee engagement. These include character (personal place, like family), leadership (caring managers), cohesion (loyalty), emphases (emphasis on employees), and rewards (fair rewarding; Jones et al., 2005).

Motivation and Employee Relations. In many instances, employees participate in projects and other non-workload responsibilities because they believe there is a greater good or it is the right thing to do (Hejjas et al., 2018). There is intrinsic value that creates this motivation for the employee. This is also related to the culture of the organization. An employee’s engagement level is driven by their perception of the organization and the corporate social responsibility taken by that organization (Hejjas et al., 2018).

Human capital is an asset and an organizational investment (Chen et al., 2012). The relationship that employees have with their co-workers and leadership can positively or
negatively impact their motivation. There is great importance of leadership to be aware of the way in which their own leadership styles and actions affect their employees’ perceptions of the organization (Caulfield & Senger, 2017). Leaders can interact in specific ways to increase the motivation of their employees. Communication, active listening, and two-way communication are ways that leaders’ awareness of their employees' views can be increased and motivation, therefore, increases (Caulfield & Senger, 2017).

**Levels of Empowerment.** Employees who feel empowered in their organization are more likely to be proactive in participating in projects that are on top of their normal responsibilities (Ying et al., 2020). Leaders in an organization can focus on the needs of their employees to nurture empowerment. When leadership focuses on empowering employees, there is a positive reaction to the commitment and willingness to change within the organization (Jung et al., 2020).

Giving employees the ability to make decisions encourages empowerment. Leaders who encourage employees to participate in decision-making positively impact commitment (Jung et al., 2020). It is also important for managers to understand and provide their employees with the ability to take risks. The risk-taking behavior of employees has a positive bearing on organizational change and empowerment (Jung et al., 2020).

**Time Constraints.** Time is a limited resource for individuals. Employees have a given amount of time in situations to complete their required or necessary tasks. When the goals and motivation of an individual are intrinsic in nature, individuals are less likely to consider a time constraint as a deterrent from participating in additional duties (Sankey & Machin, 2014).

All employees in an organization do not have the same workload at all times, nor do they have the same amount of time that can be dedicated to projects. Employees in an organization
have not only different amounts of time for additional work, but also available time will vary by day (Philip & Arrowsmith, 2020). This would make planning for projects difficult to schedule.

**Absence of Knowledge.** Many individuals in an organization may be reluctant to make decisions. In many cases of decision-making, this is due to the person’s lack of knowledge or perceived lack of knowledge on the subject (Park & Sela, 2018). When individuals do not feel as if they understand the problem at hand, they are not as likely to want to give their opinions.

When individuals are confident with the content presented, the opposite can be true. Decisions are easier made when the decision-makers understand the end goal and have more expertise in that area (Fischhoff, 2010). The presence of knowledge encourages decision-making and participation, however, the absence of knowledge discourages individuals from speaking up.

**Conclusion**

Literature concerning employee engagement has been reviewed. Related topics specific to the research have also been examined. In the review of the documentation, there were themes that have been pointed out and many relevant findings to the research topic.

**Summary of the Literature Review.** Various themes related to the research have been discussed. A nonprofit for this purpose is a company that is in business to provide a benefit but not directly in business to gain a profit (USAGov, n.d.). These nonprofit entities attempt to improve their community and culture in some way (Gratton, 2018). Monetary profits are not the main goal of the organization. Even though these organizations are not in business to gain profits, strategic planning and employee engagement are still important factors of their success.
(Gratton, 2018). Some examples of nonprofits include places of education and religious entities in relation to this study.

Strategic decision-making and planning were also examined. Competitiveness among organizations is very prevalent in the world today. Good strategic planning is one way to establish goals and objectives to ensure competitive advantage in a given market, including nonprofit organizations (Ferreira et al., 2019).

It was determined that there are many types of strategic projects and decisions that are made in organizations. Some may include technology, business process improvements, yearly planning and review meetings, objective and goal setting, and rebranding. All these types of projects can better an organization by not only setting goals and objectives but also prioritizing the tasks in the workplace that must be accomplished (Kabeyi, 2019).

Next, the idea of engaged employees was examined. Many factors can impact employee engagement, such as the personality traits of the employee, leadership, working conditions, and the culture of the organization (Pandey et al., 2020). An engaged employee is one who works their daily job and participates in other activities in their organization not solely for a paycheck but for the greater good of the organization (Eaglebarger, 2017).

The engagement of employees in for-profit organizations and nonprofits can differ due to the ways each of these types of organizations is able to motivate their employees. For-profit organizations tend to use a more non-intrinsic (material-based) type of motivation, while nonprofits use more intrinsic motivation techniques (Renard & Snelgar, 2016). This is because many employees who work in a nonprofit organization have a sense of belonging to the organization and aspire to aid their community with their work as opposed to solely working for reward-based incentives and satisfaction (Peralta, 2017).
There are other things that impact motivation besides the type of organization. Two theories were reviewed as being related to employee engagement and motivation. These include Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs as well as Transformational Leadership. Maslow’s hierarchy gives information as to the relevance of different needs that individuals have in life, and those needs are broken into a five-stage pyramid image with the most severe needs on the bottom (Stewart et al., 2018). As employees’ needs are met at the lower stages, they are able to feel additional needs and satisfy additional stages in the hierarchy (Maslow, 1943). This is relevant to business organizations because they must meet the basic needs of their employees in order to gain the maximum potential of their employees at the higher stages of the hierarchy (Stewart et al., 2018).

Leadership theory is not based on the employee as much as it is the leadership of the organization and managers. As Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs explains why employees feel as they do, leadership theory gives information as to how managers can aid in satisfying the needs of the employees at a higher level (Siangchokyoo et al., 2020). By using this theory, leaders work to establish relationships with their employees and encourage them, which increases their engagement and, overall, the organization’s profits (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017).

The next idea that impacts this study is that of the need for engaged workers. Engaged workers are seen as happier and perform better in their company (Byrne & MacDonagh, 2017). When this happens, their performance increases and the company benefits from the increased performance. When companies invest in their employees’ engagement, the daily job duties of the employees improve and the strategic decision-making of employees increases (Othman & Mahmood, 2019). When there is a lack of employee engagement in an organization, there are lost productivity costs which negatively impact the financials of the company (Slezak, 2020).
From this literature, we see that engagement is important. The issue is that in many organizations, there is a lack of engagement. Glavas (2016) noted that organizational engagement is very low. Low engagement can be caused by many factors; however, when the engagement is increased, productivity is gained, and the organization benefits (Nelson, 2017).

Some factors of low engagement may include the personality traits of the employee (Young et al., 2018). Other factors could be those controlled by the organization. These can include working conditions and leadership (Pandey et al., 2020). A negative work environment can negatively impact engagement and also negatively impact the performance of the organization as a whole (Slezak, 2020).

**Gaps in Existing Knowledge.** There are many studies that have been completed and recorded on the engagement of employees in for-profit organizations. However, there are few articles available on the engagement of employees in nonprofit organizations. Seeing as engagement is a positive attribute encouraging success in an organization, it is not only important in profit companies but also nonprofit. Therefore, this study directly adds to the existing body of knowledge on employee engagement by examining nonprofit organizations.

**Future Study Opportunities.** There are opportunities to further examine the reasons for the lack of engagement in organizations. It is stated that employee personalities may impact their want to be engaged, but there are also ideas that organizations can increase engagement in those individuals. There are many ideas as to how to increase engagement but understanding why employees have a lack of engagement to begin with is helpful. There are some theories in the literature, but there could be more evidence in this area.

There is also the opportunity to examine additional nonprofit companies. Nonprofit organizations can differ greatly in their mission as well as how their performance is measured.
These differences in the organizations may impact the level of engagement of the employees. Information concerning various types of nonprofit companies, lack of employee engagement, or methods to engage employees in these differing organizations would be beneficial to understand. Researching nonprofit organizations of any kind would be an opportunity to add to the body of knowledge.

Another helpful topic of study would be information on the varying ways in which nonprofit organizations compensate employees. There are possible conclusions that may be drawn which differ depending on how nonprofit organizations reward their employees. Relationships of intrinsic and extrinsic reward systems as they relate to employee engagement in nonprofit organizations specifically should be explored.

**Link to Research Planned.** The research examines employee engagement in nonprofit organizations. Nonprofit organizations are not as studied in the realm of employee engagement. The gaps in the literature show that research in this area is needed. The research directly relates to these topics and provides additional information on why employees lack engagement in nonprofit organizations.

**Transition and Summary of Section 1**

The purpose of this study was to gather information on employee engagement in strategic decision-making within a nonprofit organization. Information gathered by this study adds to the current body of knowledge in the field. Research questions were developed to probe employees within these nonprofit organizations for comprehensive data, which was analyzed to establish overall conclusions. The research was conducted in the form of a qualitative case study within a nonprofit organization. There have been various assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and gaps noted.
There were assumptions that the data collected will be truthful, employees will agree to participate in the study, and that the organization chosen for the study would be participating actively in strategic decisions. The potential limitations included a small number of participants and the limited workplace availability due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The study includes employees at varying levels within the organization and those in paid as well as non-paid positions. The research was conducted in a community college in Western North Carolina. This could be a potential gap because data gathered concerning employee engagement may differ from one type of nonprofit to another.

To further understand the topic of the study, an extensive literature review was completed. This review included information on nonprofit organizations, employee engagement, and relevant theories. From this point, the researcher had a foundation for the study and moved forward with designating specific participants and developing a plan for data collection.
Section 2: The Project

Section 2 of this document contains detailed information on how the study was conducted. This section includes the purpose of the study as an introductory element and follows with specifics of the study itself. The role of the researcher specifies how the researcher planned to communicate and relate to participants as well as the method in which the data were collected. The researcher’s role is important but does indeed depend heavily on the knowledge and willingness to give information to the participants (Raheim et al., 2016). The participants are defined, and details of needed permission and approval are noted. The method and design used for the study are identified and examined.

Details about data collection and techniques used to organize the information are included in this section. The importance of reliable and quality data are stated. Reliability and validity of data in research are very important and require multiple reviews of the data (Belotto, 2018). The researcher indicates how quality data collection is accomplished. Following the methods for data review and collection, the process of data analysis is indicated.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the involvement of low-level employees during the implementation of strategic organizational projects. The study poses questions that allow employees to express why they do or do not participate in strategic decisions within their organization, including personal reasons or organizational justifications. This understanding will explore the need for all employee involvement in strategic planning rather than just executive-level employees. The general problem is examined with an in-depth study of employee involvement, specifically in the strategic planning practices of a nonprofit organization.
Role of the Researcher

The researcher plays an important role in the research and analysis of data for the study. In qualitative studies, the researcher is recording information about participants’ feelings, viewpoints, and past experiences rather than numerical data (Clark & Veale, 2018). It is their responsibility to determine the participants for the study as well as develop the study questions and methods.

The foundation of the study has been set. Initially, it was determined that there was a business problem, and a purpose statement was created for the project. The researcher then formulated a set of research questions that will be the basis for data gathering. Once these items were developed, a determination was made as to the type of study that would be conducted as well as the associated methods to be used.

The qualitative study analyzed data gathered by one-on-one interviews as the primary data source. These interviews were conducted virtually. A questionnaire was also sent to participants for triangulation purposes. The validity and credibility of the data are imperative. Researchers of qualitative studies must ensure that their findings and data can be trusted (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The triangulation method was used to ensure the data collected was credible. This includes using multiple methods of collection in the study, such as interviews and a questionnaire (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

The researcher in this study was positioned between a moderate role and observer to the process. This means that the individual works in the setting where the research is conducted but is not participating in the act of providing data (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). The data for the study will be collected in a virtual manner. Data gathering in qualitative studies is increasingly becoming virtual in nature due to new media and platforms that allow for virtual data collection.
(Moser & Korstjens, 2017). Data must be gathered until the point of saturation is met (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). At the point of saturation, any new data that is collected is redundant. Once data saturation occurred, analysis was performed on the data to establish themes and conclusions of the study.

**Participants**

Participants for this study included community college employees varying in position and tenure in the organization. These participants included individuals employed as staff and/or faculty. These staff and/or faculty were employed at a level below that of a dean or director. The participants were employees of a Western North Carolina college. The researcher requested permission from the community college president to conduct the study.

Protection of the participants’ confidentiality lies within the role of the researcher. The researcher must have attributes such as respectfulness and integrity to ensure participant confidentiality (Petrova et al., 2016). The ethical principles and confidentiality of the study are taken very seriously. Some ways to ensure confidentiality when surveying a smaller sample of participants would include leaving out demographics, the use of codes, and ensuring participants that their information will not compromise their uniqueness (Petrova et al., 2016). Codes were used in the published data for the identification of participants rather than names and specific position titles. Minimal demographic information was requested from the participants.

Along with ensuring confidentiality, it is essential that the study is conducted in an ethical manner. Any questions asked must be consistent and not vary from participant to participant (Ngozwana, 2018). Qualitative research is flexible. However, the questions asked must be standardized in order to gather data for proper analysis. Standard questions ensure the participants are treated fairly.
No negative repercussions will derive from the research. The research data collected is considered confidential and cannot be used against the participant. This was discussed with the President and Vice President of Strategy when permission for the study was requested. This was also noted for all participants in the agreement to participate. It is important that the participants give informed consent prior to data collection (Resnik, 2016).

**Research Method and Design**

All research must have a planned approach to find the best results possible (Mohajan, 2018). For this study, the best approach was to use qualitative methodology. The data collected was not numerical, as is the case with quantitative studies. Questions for this study were formulated to ask “why” participants choose to participate or not participate in strategic decision-making within their organization.

**Discussion of Method**

Qualitative research provides ways to explore a diverse group of individuals and understand underlying thoughts and opinions (Choy, 2014). The qualitative structure allows for the researcher to ask questions that will provide a wide range of information. The data gathered contained many possible responses for analysis, and data themes were created. The participants were asked to share their thoughts and opinions, which is a trait of qualitative research (Hammarberg et al., 2015). The result of this structure also provides large quantities of data for analysis, which in some cases can complicate the findings (Mohajan, 2018).

**Discussion of Design**

Qualitative research is known for utilizing surveys and case studies to gather data (Mohajan, 2018). The data were gathered in the form of electronic surveys and discussion
forums. Participants answered in the form of open-ended questions, which allowed for detailed information.

This study was conducted using a flexible design in the form of a case study. By using a case study, it permits in-depth content and assessments (Mohajan, 2018). The study was conducted as a retrospective case. This requires that the participants provide data concerning a past experience that is relative to the research questions (Mohajan, 2018). The case was a single case study in that only one particular situation will be analyzed (Siggelkow, 2007). The participants in the case provided information on their strategic engagement in a recent strategic initiative in their place of employment.

**Summary of Research Method and Design**

The method and design used in the study were selected by determining the type of data needed to answer the questions related to the business problem. For this study, the best approach is to utilize the qualitative methodology and a flexible single case design. This is due to the variety and depth of information that can be gathered in a qualitative case (Siggelkow, 2007).

Qualitative studies provide a way for participants to give their full thoughts and opinions (Choy, 2014). The business problem can best be explored by analyzing the complete information that is available when individuals give in-depth answers to questions. A case study was used, which allows the researcher to examine particular examples of situations that the individual participants have experienced. The use of interviews and a questionnaire gave the researcher the best opportunity to gather participants due to most employees in the organization working remotely.
Population and Sampling

The population for this research study included current full-time employees at a Western North Carolina community college. Participants selected included employees who are faculty and staff employed below the level of director or dean. These individuals perform various duties within the community college, such as instruction, advising, student support, maintenance, financial aid, grounds, and all other functions of the college. The interview sampling was purposeful, and all employees meeting the criteria were invited to participate in the questionnaire for triangulation.

Discussion of Population

The population selection for this qualitative case study was an integral part of the planning and implementation process. A population must be selected that will provide in-depth information about their experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The population included participants who are full-time college employees and do not hold the title of director/dean or above. The population consisted of individuals varying in age, race, gender, experience, tenure, and salary.

In this organization, there were a total of 98 full-time faculty employees and 155 full-time staff. A total of 40 individuals did not apply to the population due to their title being that of director/dean or above. This allowed for a potential sample size of 213 participants if everyone invited to participate accepted the offer. To remove any bias, the researcher removed 17 additional individuals from the potential population. These 17 individuals have either worked under the researcher in the past, were currently working under the researcher, or someone with whom the researcher had much contact. This brought the total potential participant count to 196 individuals. According to Creswell (2013), data saturation can be met when the participant count
is between 15 and 30 individuals. For this study, a baseline of 15 interviews was set, however, interviews continued until data saturation was met. At that point, the remaining individuals in the participant pool were asked to participate in an online questionnaire for triangulation.

These individuals were spread between three locations. The college is made up of two campus locations and one center. The physical buildings of the college are located across three Western North Carolina counties. The selected population included individuals working in all locations.

**Discussion of Sampling**

A large number of qualitative studies use purposive sampling (Kegler et al., 2018). In this qualitative study the purposive sampling method was used to allow the researcher to gather information from participants that had experience related to the business problem. The researcher selected a particular group of individuals, which includes no randomness (Sharma, 2017). By doing this, the data gathered was relative to the research questions and provided insight into recurring themes. Purposive sampling methods aid in obtaining data saturation (Etikan, 2016). By using purposive sampling, randomness is removed, and the likelihood of participants providing in-depth data about a topic increases (Campbell et al., 2020).

A combination of maximum variation sampling and convenience sampling was implemented specifically. Maximum variation allows for the researcher to include participants from broad backgrounds with various degrees of experience and tenure (Etikan, 2016). The convenience was due to the organization being in close proximity to the researcher. The community college in which the data were collected is made up of many individuals with varying backgrounds.
Summary of Population and Sampling

The population for this study included full-time individuals employed by a community college in Western North Carolina. These were employees whose titles are below the director/dean level. The employees were asked to participate in an interview where questions were asked in a virtual format. Other individuals were asked to participate in completing an online questionnaire for triangulation. The sample of individuals was purposive in nature to ensure that individuals who were selected would be able to provide comprehensive information about their experience. The researcher was aware that the individuals in this organization had insight on the topic and would be able to provide substantive feedback and information. The purposive sampling technique used was maximum variation, which included a broad group of individuals who brought their own varying experiences into the study.

Data Collection

Creswell and Poth (2018) noted the process of data collection as being a sequence of related activities that are completed to gather information and answer questions related to a research problem. These activities are done to ensure complete and accurate data are captured. It involves not only gathering the actual data for a study but also includes ensuring that permission is granted within the organization to complete the study, resolving potential ethical and confidentiality issues, and recording the information that is retrieved in an organized manner (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The collection process began with the approval to collect the data. A permission request (Appendix A) was presented to the college president. After approval was granted, the researcher focused on the instruments used in data collection, the collection technique, and the data organization techniques. The instruments of collection for this qualitative study included the
researcher as well as questions provided in the interview guide (Appendix D). The collection techniques discussed include a virtual interview process for primary data collection and an online questionnaire for triangulation. After the data were captured and transcribed, a spreadsheet was used to house the data, and then NVivo software was being used to aid in identifying themes during analysis.

**Instruments**

One instrument used in qualitative data collection is the researcher. The researcher’s role in qualitative studies is more participatory in nature than detached (Clark & Veale, 2018). The researcher should submerge themselves into the setting of the research in order to see from the participant’s point of view and understand their experiences better (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). The researcher is the main instrument that will be used in the collection and analysis of the data (Clark & Veale, 2018). Their involvement is crucial to the success of the study and the results that are formulated from the data. In collecting and analyzing the data, the researcher must minimize their own preconceptions and beliefs (Clark & Veale, 2018). To do this, the researcher must reveal to themselves their own thoughts and understand how to alleviate those thoughts from skewing the research. Clark and Veale (2018) suggested that to do this, a researcher should think reflectively and interpretively to evaluate the topic properly.

The interview guide is also an instrument to be used for data collection. The interview guide is made up of fourteen main questions along with clarifying questions. These questions probe for information from the participants that relate to one of the three research questions derived from the business problem. Questions one through three located in the interview guide (Appendix D) provide demographic criteria to help the researcher analyze the data into additional silos. This helped determine if variables such as tenure, role, and department play a
role in the engagement of employees. The data requested were high-level enough not to identify participants and will keep participants’ identities confidential.

The second group of questions (4 through 8) addresses research question one. This question asks why employees would be minimally engaged in strategic projects within their organization. Questions include determining if participants are familiar at all with the strategic plan currently being implemented if the participants are engaged already in the planning process if the participants feel that they have the knowledge to aid in the strategy implementation, how much time a participant assumes would be spent engaging in strategy, and the participant’s idea of the culture of the organization and their buy-in status.

The third group of questions (9 through 12) addresses research question two. Research question two brings leadership into the criteria for examination. This question asks about the actions taken by the leadership in the organization to encourage engagement. Questions asked of participants include how their direct supervisor encourages engagement in strategic projects, how the community college president encourages engagement of faculty and staff, what motivates the participant to be engaged in strategy in their organization, and examples of any motivational experience that has impacted them to be engaged in any current or prior place of employment.

The fourth and final group of questions (13 and 14) relate to research question three. Research question three was to determine why an individual in an organization would choose not to participate and be engaged in the strategic projects within their organization. These questions are scenario-based and allow the participant to expand on what they would do or how they would react. The first scenario asked the participant to express how they would react if their direct supervisor asked them to participate in a strategic project. The second scenario asked the participant if they would ever consider contacting a strategic project team lead and ask to assist
on a project if they know that they possess skills and knowledge that would benefit that strategic project.

Data Collection Techniques

The techniques for data collection in this study included interviews for primary data collection and an online questionnaire for triangulation. Group forums, interviews, and surveys are common techniques used in qualitative study data collection (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). Focus groups and interviews are beneficial in that they generate an opportunity for the participant to provide deep information on their past experiences (Gill et al., 2008). Qualitative research survey questions encourage participants to provide in-depth information, which allows recurring themes to be drawn during data analysis (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). These questions were asked in the interview as they were written on the questionnaire.

Potential interview participants were be sent a recruitment email containing the interview participant consent document (Appendix B) with an explanation of the study. Within the email, there were instructions on how to volunteer to participate in a virtual interview. The participants were told in the email that their participation in the study was optional. If the participants chose to participate in the interviews, they contacted the researcher to indicate their choice.

Potential questionnaire participants were sent a recruitment email containing the questionnaire participant consent document (Appendix C) with an explanation of the study. If the participant chose to complete the online questionnaire, they clicked on the link in the email and were directed to an online survey containing the consent document and the questions located in the interview guide (Appendix D).
Data Organization Techniques

Data collected from qualitative studies may vary greatly from participant to participant. The data were captured from either an interview or an online questionnaire. The information collected in the interviews was transcribed and recorded with the virtual platform video option as well as a voice recorder to allow the researcher access to review the experience multiple times. The researcher also took field notes as the discussions progressed. Field notes are created during discussions to allow the researcher to observe and record nonverbal cues and impressions that exist but are not evident in voiced answers (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The interview participants were given a numeric code to distinguish the method of data collection in the overall spreadsheet from the questionnaire. When participants completed the questionnaire, the data were collected for each individual directly into an Excel spreadsheet. Questionnaire participants remained anonymous and did not require coding.

The data were organized by question and participant. The participant codes were listed as rows in the spreadsheet. The specific questions were represented by the columns within the spreadsheet. Color coding and a legend were used to categorize specific answers to questions into evolving themes in the research. Coding can assist the researcher by identifying items that are similar and different in the data (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

Summary of Data Collection

Data collection is a research process that is defined broadly at the beginning of a study and narrowed down as research is conducted (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). In this study, data collection involved participants engaging in an interview or an online questionnaire. All questions from the interview guide were asked of participants completing the interview or questionnaire for data consistency.
The data collected from the interviews were transcribed and keyed into an Excel spreadsheet. The researcher recorded the interviews to ensure all content was on record and added it into the spreadsheet for evaluation and analysis. The data collected from the questionnaire were auto populated into an Excel spreadsheet. The participants in the interviews were coded using numbers. Those participating in the online questionnaire did not require coding due to their information remaining completely anonymous. Once all the data were keyed or populated in an organized manner into the Excel spreadsheet, the sheet was be saved and protected with a password for further security and confidentiality. At the point of data saturation and the point at which no other individuals are participating, the data can then be sorted and categorized by patterns and themes (Clark & Veale, 2018).

**Data Analysis**

Once data were collected, they were analyzed to establish conclusions. Per Basit (2010), the process of data analysis is the most vital part of qualitative studies. Data analysis consists of arranging the data, reading through the information collected, coding the data into themes, characterizing the data, and interpreting the data into useful information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Researchers have the option to code and analyze data using traditional methods or computerized software. Traditional methods of analysis may include using pens to color code information or using sticky notes to collect thoughts (Maher et al., 2018). Computerized software is helpful in organizing and coding the data; however, the researcher must still conduct the analysis on the data for conclusions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, the researcher collected the initial data in an Excel spreadsheet. At the time of analysis, the data were imported into the NVivo computerized software program to aid in analysis and coding.
Qualitative data analysis is an incremental process, and analysis should be performed as data are collected to help shape study findings (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). Analysis of qualitative data can be time-consuming and complex (Azungah, 2018). Therefore, beginning analysis as data were gathered was a helpful step.

**Coding Process**

The process of coding is used in almost all qualitative research (Elliott, 2018). This qualitative study consists of data that varied from participant to participant. Coding is a way to take a variety of data and transfer that information into useful themes and related topics in order for the data to make sense (Elliott, 2018). The three main stages of coding include open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The first coding stage is open coding. This is the coding stage in which data categories are created (Glaser, 2016). The interview and questionnaire data were present in raw form at this time and the potential use of coding software (NVivo) was utilized. The data were reviewed, compared, and contrasted to allow trends and categories to emerge (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The second coding stage is axial coding. Axial coding is performed after open coding is completed and the categories are available (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this coding phase, the researcher takes one of the categories from the result of open coding and performs deeper analysis (Kendall, 1999). This process entails putting the data back together differently by connecting categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The final coding stage is selective coding. Selective coding occurs when the researcher takes the categories and data structure developed within the first two stages and creates a narrative of the information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The narrative presents the information in
story format. The narrative describes the relationships between the categories (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Summary of Data Analysis**

In this qualitative study, data were analyzed in detail after being collected. Data analysis is not only the coding of the data, but is a process that expands throughout the project (Basit, 2010). The raw data from the interviews and questionnaire were imported and keyed directly into an Excel spreadsheet. After the data were collected, it was imported into computerized software (NVivo) for categorization and sorting. The open, axial, and selective coding methods were used for data categorization and analysis.

**Reliability and Validity**

When conducting a study, the researcher is responsible for ensuring that their findings are reliable and valid (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher is the main source of ensuring reliability and validity. However, advances in technology and software applications have made available packages such as NVivo, which can be another way to prove that data are reliable and valid (Hafeez-Baig et al., 2016). For this study, the researcher ensured reliability and validity through the data collection and analysis process and also used NVivo for additional assurance.

Two items that are of great importance in reliable and valid data are saturation and triangulation. Saturation is the point when the further collection of data would not provide new information (Saunders et al., 2018). According to Creswell (2013), data saturation in qualitative research may be reached at a point between 15 and 30 participants. In this study, there were approximately 200 individuals who met the participant criteria. The baseline for questionnaire participants was 50 individuals. By having an initial potential participant pool of 200 individuals,
the researcher was confident that there would be enough participation to obtain between 15 and 30 primary data sets and sufficient questionnaire triangulation data sets.

Triangulation is also a crucial part of capturing reliable and valid data. Triangulation is the process of looking at the same topic or idea in varying ways and from different angles (Abdalla et al., 2018). This can include the use of multiple sources of data, methods, and theories to bring forth themes or specific perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the researcher conducted interviews as the primary method of data collection but also used an online questionnaire for triangulation. Even though two options for the collection were used, the interview questions were consistent. The study also includes many different participants from varying positions and levels within the organization. Triangulation occurs by doing this, and the data collected is considered valid.

**Reliability**

Reliability in a study can be addressed with detailed notes, good recordings, proper transcriptions, and well-developed coding (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, the researcher developed a comprehensive interview guide. The interview guide included all questions that will be asked of participants in the interviews and on the questionnaire. The interview guide questions were consistent in both methods of data gathering. The interview guide was developed to allow participants an opportunity to give open-ended responses and in-depth information.

Once data are gathered from the participants, coding occurred. Coding is the process of categorizing and assembling themed data in order to understand the data (Williams & Moser, 2019). The data from the interviews and online questionnaire was keyed into an Excel spreadsheet initially. From there, the data were imported into the NVivo software for additional coding. By using the NVivo software, data reliability was increased.
Validity

Validity in research involves achieving accurate information through the researcher, participants, and data interacting in a way to increase exactness (Cho & Trent, 2006). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), there are three different strategy groups to obtain validity, including the researcher, participants, and reviewers. The researcher is the initial checkpoint for validity. To increase validity, the researcher can use many data sources, which is triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the researcher used many participants and also two methods of data collection to achieve triangulation. The researcher can also increase validity by disconfirming evidence that does not fit within the themes of the data and may be seen as a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This is noted in the coding process. The final way in which the researcher particularly plays a part in validation is by clarifying their own bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By doing this, the researcher understands how their own experiences and thoughts may impact the study.

The participants of the study play a large role in validity. One way that this is accomplished is through member checking or participant feedback (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the researcher provided a post-interview discussion with interview participants to ensure the data collected and documented indeed represented the views of the participants. The second way participants are involved in validation is the amount of time the researcher engages with the participants in the field (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher must be familiar with the participants and the research organization. In this study, the researcher is an employee of the organization in which the study is being conducted. This creates extreme familiarity, which increases validity. The researcher can also collaborate with the participants. Collaborating with the participants is the third way that the participants can increase validity (Creswell & Poth,
To do this, the researcher can provide opportunities throughout the study for the participants to be engaged in the study. Lastly, validity is increased when reviewers are involved. Including individuals other than the researcher in the study can be accomplished by three strategies. These include external audits to ensure the researcher’s accuracy, providing detailed descriptions within the study to allow complete understanding, and the researcher allowing for peer reviews of the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the researcher allowed for the data to be peer-reviewed by an individual familiar with the study. This ensured that there is understanding from a point-of-view other than that of the researcher.

**Summary of Reliability and Validity**

Qualitative research must concentrate on reliable and valid data. In order for reliability and validity to be present in a study, data saturation must be met. This can be accomplished by ensuring at least 15 to 30 sets of data (participants) are present in the final analysis (Creswell, 2013). For this study, the researcher had approximately 200 potential participants, which yielded enough participation for data saturation. Triangulation was made possible in this study through the use of many participants varying in level and position within the organization as well as through the two given methods for participation, including interviews and an online questionnaire. Using multiple data sources, methods, and theories in research can aid in establishing strong themes during data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Reliability is accomplished with detailed notes, recordings, transcripts, and coding (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Coding is of great importance due to this being the process of categorizing the raw data and making it understandable (Williams & Moser, 2019). This study used coding not only in manual form but also with the assistance of the NVivo software. Validity
involves the interconnection of the researcher, participants, and data to ensure accuracy (Cho & Trent, 2006). For this study, the researcher used triangulation along with collaborating with the participants and immersing them in the organization’s culture. For increased validity, the researcher requested for the data to be reviewed by a peer for assurance of clarity.

Transition and Summary of Section 2

This section concentrated on the project portion of this study. The role of the researcher was defined as well as the research method and design that will be used. The study was completed as a qualitative case in which interviews were conducted. Participants were defined as full-time employees at Community College A below the level of dean or director. The population included employees who vary in age, race, gender, experience at the institution, tenure, and salary range. The sample of individuals was purposive in nature to ensure the interviewees are familiar with the topic being discussed.

For this study, primary data were collected by the researcher in the form of interviews. A questionnaire was used for triangulation purposes after data saturation occurred in the interview process. The questions for the interviews, as well as the questionnaire, were developed to probe for information that directly relates to one of the three research questions derived from the business problem.

Data were collected from the interviews in the form of video and audio recordings. At that point, the information from the interviews was transcribed and documented also in a spreadsheet. Once all of the data were collected for the interviews, additional data were gathered from the questionnaire for triangulation. The data were manually reviewed by the researcher in the spreadsheet but were also imported into NVivo software for further examination. Coding occurred in order to translate the raw data into themes and topics.
The data collection and analysis must be reliable and valid. Saturation and triangulation of data are two ways in which the data can be deemed more reliable and valid. Saturation occurs when the additional collection of data would provide no new theme information (Saunders et al., 2018). In qualitative studies, the point of saturation may be reached by including 15 to 30 participants (Creswell, 2013). This study did aim to interview at least 15 individuals and continued with interviews until saturation was reached.

Triangulation is the process of viewing ideas in various ways and from different angles (Abdalla et al., 2018). In this study, a questionnaire was sent out to individuals in the population who did not participate in the interviews. The interview guide questions were asked, and the data were analyzed to ensure the themes remained the same as with the primary data. All of these items together ensured the reliability and validity of the study data.
Section 3: Application of Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Section 3 is devoted to presenting the findings from the study, noting the application to professional practice, recommendations for further study, reflections, and the final conclusion and summary of the research. The findings portion of the section is a comprehensive picture of the results of the given study as well as definitions and explanations of the themes that are evident in the data analysis. The themes are interpreted, and visualizations of the data are provided. The researcher presents information on the relationships between the data collected and the given themes.

The application to professional practice piece includes information on how this research and analysis will improve general business practices and a view of potential application strategies. The recommendations for further study segment provides points of potential future research that may expand on the research. The reflections portion of Section 3 includes personal and professional growth and a biblical perspective of the research. Finally, Section 3 concludes with summary information of the findings as well as conclusions of the research.

Overview of the Study

This study began with a problem in the strategic project sector of business. The problem researched is that of strategic project engagement of non-executive employees in a nonprofit organization. The specific problem to be addressed is the minimal non-executive employee engagement in strategic project implementation within the nonprofit organization setting resulting in failed initiatives. As seen in the literature, it is imperative to include all levels of individuals within an organization to have a successful strategic project implementation (Stretton, 2018). Therefore, the given problem statement concerning the low engagement of
individuals in non-executive positions within an organization suggests that all levels of individuals are not present and could result in failed initiatives.

When employees in an organization are not engaged, there is a negative impact on the competitive and strategic advantage of that organization (Taneja et al., 2015). This study has the purpose of collecting data to understand the potential causes of low employee engagement in organizations. In order to obtain the necessary information for analysis, the researcher has chosen to conduct a qualitative flexible case study. By using qualitative methodology, it will allow the researcher to gather and analyze the data as a whole (Liao & Hitchcock, 2018). The flexible case is used to offer flexibility during the study as responses continually surface and provide a large focus area of information (Queiros et al., 2017). Timing is also a factor of the method and design selection. A qualitative flexible case allows for the researcher to collect real-time data about current topics and not retrospective information (Reinecke et al., 2016). For this particular research, real-time data were collected due to the nonprofit organization examined being currently in the process of implementing strategic projects.

In order to understand more about the given problem statement, the researcher developed a set of specific research questions to prompt further interview questions and guide the research. There are three main questions and two subquestions for the first RQ1.

RQ1: Why is there minimal engagement of employees other than those in leadership positions (President, Vice President, Dean, and Director) in strategic projects?

RQ1a: What are specific reasons that mid to low-level working individuals feel that their expertise is not needed or wanted in strategic project decision-making?
RQ1b: What organizational qualities create a desire for average working individuals to feel as if their involvement is needed and wanted in strategic projects?

RQ2: What actions are taken by leaders (President, Vice President, Dean, and Director) that contribute to the engagement effort of all other employees and stakeholders?

RQ3: Why would an employee at any level in an organization choose not to be engaged in strategic projects?

Once the research questions were established, the researcher determined specific concepts and theories that related to these questions and the problem at hand. Those concepts included a positive relationship between successful initiatives (including strategic initiatives) and employee engagement, as well as a positive relationship between meeting strategic goals and organizations investing in employees. These two concepts are supported by Maslow’s Motivational Theory and Transformational Leadership Theory.

To support the problem statement and research planned, the researcher completed a review of the literature surrounding this topic. Literature reviewed included topics on nonprofit organizations, including organizations such as schools and churches. The researcher also reviewed other topics of interest such as overall strategic decision-making, employee engagement trends in organizations (profit and nonprofit), employee motivation, Maslow’s Motivational Theory, and Transformational Leadership Theory. The analysis of the literature was directly linked to the problem statement for the research as well as the research questions.

Once the review of literature was complete, the researcher began planning the study details. First, the organization for review was chosen. The nonprofit organization used in the study is Community College A, which is located in Western North Carolina. A pseudonym is
being used to protect the organization’s confidentiality. Permission was granted by the president of the college to complete the study. Potential participants for the study were designated as non-executive employees of the college. This included anyone at the organization employed full-time with a job title below director or dean. This included both faculty and staff positions. A wide range of potential participants was chosen to provide in-depth accounts of their experiences and encounters (Creswell & Poth, 2018). At the time of gathering a list of potential participants, there were a total of 98 full-time faculty and 155 full-time staff employed at Community College A. However, 40 of those individuals are at or above the level of director/dean and were removed from the participant pool. Seventeen additional individuals were removed from the potential participant pool due to their interaction with the researcher. They were taken from the potential participants to remove any possible bias. The final group of potential participants was located across three geographic locations of Community College A.

The study consisted of one-on-one interviews as the main source of data. Interview questions were created to gather information concerning the research questions stated above. These interview questions are located in this document as Appendix D. An online questionnaire was also developed using the interview questions. The questionnaire was used for the triangulation of the data.

From the potential participant pool, over 25 potential interview candidates were selected. This was completed through purposeful sampling, which removes the randomness of selection, and participants are selected who can provide deep responses about the given topic (Campbell et al., 2020). The potential interview candidates were contacted and asked to participate. Once there was an agreement to participate, the researcher met via Microsoft Teams virtually to conduct the interviews. Virtual meetings were required due to the campus being closed to faculty and staff
due to COVID-19. The interviews were recorded in Microsoft Teams as well as through a voice recorder. The interviewees were made aware that their identity would remain confidential, and coding would be used to keep their identity secured during data analysis and when the findings were written. The interview sessions were transcribed, and those transcriptions were sent to the interviewees for approval or discussion. Once 23 interviews were conducted, data saturation was met, and interviews were concluded. The researcher uploaded the transcription data from the 23 interviews into NVivo and began coding and analyzing the data. Prior to uploading the transcript data into NVivo, the interview transcripts were given numerical codes to ensure their confidentiality.

As data analysis was occurring using the interview documentation, a questionnaire was sent out to all other individuals in the potential participant pool via email. This questionnaire was to be used for triangulation of the data. The researcher ensured that participants completing the questionnaire were aware that their participation would be anonymous. The online questionnaire collected no information that would provide the identity of the individual providing the information. There were 48 individuals who began the online questionnaire. However, only 42 of those individuals provided information other than demographic information. The data from those 42 individuals who completed the entire survey are included in the data. The data from that questionnaire was also uploaded, from a Microsoft Excel document, into the NVivo software, coded, and analyzed by the researcher. The data from the questionnaire indeed proved the credibility of the data from the interviews. Ensuring the validity of the data from the interviews and main information sources is imperative to qualitative studies (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). After the data from the questionnaire results were analyzed, the researcher searched the data for
themes and direct relationships to the research questions, which leads to the following sections of the research documentation.

**Presentation of the Findings**

This qualitative case study was conducted in February 2021 at Community College A in Western North Carolina. The interview participants included full-time faculty and staff ranging from new hires to individuals with over 20 years’ experience within the organization. The employees who participated represented various areas/departments/divisions at the college and all three campus geographic locations. Data are given below concerning the demographics of those who participated in the interviews as well as those who participated in the questionnaire for triangulation.

Table 1 represents the breakdown of the interview participants by years of service. Table 2 documents the role the interview participants have at the college, whether faculty or staff. Table 3 notes the division in which the interview participants work at Community College A.

In the interview participant pool, 52% of the participants have been employed at the organization for 0-9 years, 31% have been employed 10-19 years, and 17% have been employed for 20 or more years. Of these same participants, 61% are considered staff, 35% faculty, and 4% play a role that has staff and faculty duties. From the 23 interview participants, 26% were employed in the Finance & Administration division, 18% from the Instructional Support & Student Services division, 13% from the Arts & Sciences division, 13% from a campus/center not on the main campus, 9% from the Applied Career Technologies division, 5% from the Business & Public Service Technologies division, and 4% from the Health Sciences, Institutional Advancement, Office of Instruction, and Workforce Development & Community Education divisions. Below are tables that show the breakdown of the interview participant pool.
Table 1

Tenure: Interview Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenure</th>
<th>0-9 years</th>
<th>10-19 years</th>
<th>20 years and above</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

Role: Interview Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Both</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

Division: Interview Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Sciences</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied Career Technologies</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus/Center (not main campus)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business &amp; Public Service Technologies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance &amp; Administration</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Sciences</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Advancement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Support &amp; Student Services</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office of Instruction</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workforce Development &amp; Community Education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 represents the breakdown of the questionnaire participants by years of service.

Table 5 documents the role the questionnaire participants have at the college, whether faculty or staff. Table 4 notes the division in which the questionnaire participants work at Community College A.
From the questionnaire pool of 42 individuals, 62% of participants have been employed at the organization for 0-9 years, 31% have been employed for 10-19 years, and 7% have been employed for 20 or more years. Of those participants, 62% have staff positions and 38% are employed as faculty. A vast array of divisions was represented in the questionnaire results. From the 42 participants, 19% were employed in the Arts & Sciences division, 19% from the Instructional Support & Student Services division, 17% chose the “other” option, 12% from the Workforce Development & Community Education division, 7% from the Applied Career Technologies, Finance & Administration, and Health Sciences divisions, 5% from the campus/center not on the main campus and Business & Public Service Technologies divisions, and 2% from the Institutional Advancement division. Below are tables that show the breakdown of the questionnaire participant pool.

Table 4

Tenure: Questionnaire Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenure</th>
<th>0-9 years</th>
<th>10-19 years</th>
<th>20 years and above</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5

Role: Questionnaire Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Both</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6

Division: Questionnaire Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Sciences</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied Career Technologies</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus/Center (not main campus)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business &amp; Public Service Technologies</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance &amp; Administration</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Sciences</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Advancement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Support &amp; Student Services</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workforce Development &amp; Community Education</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After conducting 23 interviews with employees at Community College A, the investigator realized that data saturation was met, and interviews were concluded. According to Creswell (2013), saturation can occur with a population of between 15 and 30 individuals. This study does indeed fit those specific criteria with 23 interview participants and 42 questionnaire participants.

Themes Discovered

As a result of the analysis of data, a total of six evident themes were developed. These were conclusions based on the interviews, researcher notes, literature review, and framework used by the researcher. The questionnaire used for triangulation also supported the themes developed. The six themes include:

1. Participation Requests
2. Culture of Care
3. Motivation and Employee Relations
4. Levels of Empowerment
5. Time Constraints

6. Absence of Knowledge

These six themes were consistent among the interviews conducted. Information given from the interviewees did differ in some specifics. However, the overall themes remained evident. The questionnaire data collected supported the findings of the interviews. The same themes and overall responses were evident in both forms of data collection, primary and triangulation.

**Interpretation of the Themes**

As stated by Creswell and Poth (2018), themes are pieces of information that come together during qualitative analysis to establish a common concept. In this qualitative case study, six apparent themes were formed. Those themes include participation requests, culture of care, motivation and employee relations, levels of empowerment, time constraints, and absence of knowledge. This section of the research documentation will provide a detailed interpretation of these themes as well as excerpts from interviews, which support these themes.

**Participation Requests.** One of the first themes to emerge from the research was that employees will most always participate in projects when they are directly requested to serve. All eight of the individuals who noted that they were indeed on a strategic committee stated that they were placed on the committee or someone asked them personally to serve. There were no individuals participating on a strategic committee who requested for themselves to be included on the committee.

A question was asked to all the interviewees concerning their likelihood to participate on a committee if their direct supervisor asked them to do so. From the interviews, there was a consistent majority stating that they would indeed participate in a strategic project if directly
asked to do so by their supervisor. Two other individuals stated that they would need to know more about the committee and the goals of that committee to agree to participate. However, out of those who immediately stated they would participate, two main reasons were given.

The first was that if their direct supervisor asked them to participate that they would feel as though their supervisor valued their opinions and also believed in them and their skillset enough to ask them to do something so important to the institution. The second reason given that would cause the individual to immediately agree to participate was respect. The interviewees noted they would do as their supervisor asks out of respect for that position. They also relayed that by being asked to participate the feel needed, wanted, like they have something to add, and respected.

The research concept shown with this data is that of human knowledge. As stated by Qureshi and Ghani (2015), competitive advantage and successful implementation of strategy are products of respecting and utilizing the intellectual capital within an organization. By requesting individuals in all areas of an organization to participate in decision-making, leadership roles are indirectly stating to their employees that their work is valued, and they are valued as individuals in the workplace. When this occurs, the effects of Transformational Leadership Theory are seen. Leaders who request participation are stimulating engagement of varying employees and, therefore, their own strategic goals and strategy is strengthened (Donnelly, 2018). This type of authentic leadership positively impacts the employee in their work as well as strengthens their buy-in of the organization’s goals and objectives (Coxen et al., 2016).

When asked how Participant 15 was chosen or volunteered for a committee they stated, “I was probably volunteered by my supervisor. But I often volunteer for those kinds of things, so it wasn’t like they had to tie me down for it. They didn’t have to beg.” All interviewees who
were participants in a strategic project indicated that they were there because they were placed on the committee. Out of those eight individuals, seven of them did indicate that they would indeed participate again on the committee if they were asked. Participant 04 noted that they would participate again “because I really do feel like we've made a great effort.” The participant elaborated that they enjoy working on committees that have a clear end goal and can see that goal achieved and the results of their time and effort.

Another participant noted that their main reason for accepting a position on a strategic project was that they appreciate the willingness of leadership to hear from different voices within the organization. Participant 14 commented with the statement below.

I appreciate the fact that the folks who are kind of spearheading the strategic plan recognize the different voices at the community college, and they see those voices as all integral, integral and important in the development of the plan, rather than just looking at it from an administrative point of view.

There was only one individual who stated that if asked to participate again that they would not do so. Participant 08 stated, “I felt that there really is a disconnect between faculty and staff, and the committee I was on had many faculty members and not many staff members.” This individual continued to state that they hope that in the future, there can be more events that promote a connection of all employees at the college rather than a silo approach.

**Culture of Care.** The second theme evident in the data analysis is that of a culture of care. When examining the information given by the interview participants, the researcher did a word count within the codes related to the college culture. This was done to quickly determine what rises to the forefront. The words students, people, community, family, help, encourage, fantastic, welcoming, ideas, and everyone were some of the most used words when our
participants described the culture of Community College A. All of these are positive words, which provide quick realizations that there is a great sense of positivity when employees think of the place they work.

Out of all interviews conducted, most participants were very positive about the culture at Community College A. There were only two instances in the interview documentation that referenced any negativity. One of those participants mentioned a disconnect between faculty and staff which can cause tension at times. The other expressed that their perception of the culture was different at times depending on the area in which they were employed and their interaction with their supervisor. Both of these participants ultimately stated that their main feeling of the culture was student-centered but did voice these two concerns. Overall, the data shows extreme positivity and an overwhelming focus on students and a willingness to aid those students in the completion of their credential at Community College A as well as obtaining employment after their credential completion.

By asking the participants for their personal perception of the culture of Community College A, a follow-up question was established. The follow-up question asked the participants if the culture they mentioned would affect their willingness to participate in strategic projects within the organization. There were 22 of the 23 interview participants that stated the current culture of being student-centered and working toward a common goal of helping students and helping the community does indeed encourage them to participate in their everyday work as well as additional work such as strategic projects. They expressed that their main goal of helping others ultimately makes them strive to do more. There was one participant who stated that it would depend on the situation and the individual. This participant stated that they had previously been in roles within the organization that gave them feelings of discouragement, but since that
time, the individual has changed positions and feels very encouraged and positive about their work and the culture of the college.

As realized from the literature reviewed, the ultimate goal of a nonprofit organization is to improve its nearby community (Gratton, 2018). As proven from the research, it is evident that the employees of Community College A value their community and the culture of the organization directly works to impact the lives of the individuals at the college as well as provide a great workforce for the community. The goals and objectives of an organization create the culture of the organization (Kabeyi, 2019). Individuals in leadership positions create their overall mission and determine the priority of certain goals and objectives (George et al., 2019). By the leadership of the organization expressing their goals and engaging in strategic projects, specifically concentrated on students and the community, it has trickled down into the perception of the culture, which ultimately aids in the implementation of these projects.

When one participant was asked specifically to give their perception of the culture at Community College A, they referenced that most individuals at the college genuinely wish for students to be successful. Participant 10 noted that the culture is “nurturing to our students.” The word family is another concept that many participants reference concerning the perception of the culture. Specifically, Participant 09 went into further detail about what the idea of feeling like a family means.

Kind of like a family, kind of like people working together to solve problems. It doesn't seem to be a place where people are afraid to try new ideas. And everybody seems to be, or at least to say that they're really for the student, and I think most people really, truly feel that way.
The idea that the overall community’s reputation of the college, the college culture, and the programs offered is also a topic that many participants mentioned. In three specific instances during the interview process, participants noted that not only is the college a benefit for the students, faculty, and staff, but also for the public. There are amenities such as a walking trail, playground, and picnic area that provide enjoyment for everyone in the community. Participant 18 specifically mentioned the reputation of programs offered at the college.

The reason we have a good reputation with some of the programs is because everyone here, I believe, knows how special it is to work here. And if you know you got something good, you want to take care of it. You want to invest in it.

Overall, the participants of the interviews appreciate the culture at Community College A. They believe that having a caring and student-centered culture is what is valued most. Many individuals verified this information by stating that the culture of the college is what makes them want to work there and be better employees. This would include their willingness to participate in committees within the organization and to participate in strategic projects.

**Motivation and Employee Relations.** There were three specific questions asked in the interviews on the topic of motivation. Specifically, questions were directed toward motivation to participate in strategic projects. Interviewees were asked to explain how their direct supervisor and the President of the college encourage them to participate in strategic projects. The participants were also asked if encouragement from these individuals at the leadership level motivates them to participate in projects as well as if they recall any other specific motivators they have experienced in the workplace.

The theme of motivation and employee relations is directly related to the concepts and theories posed by the researcher. Specifically, the data analysis shows a correlation between
Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and transformational leadership theory. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs would be related to the idea that these employees are working to enhance their personal growth (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2016). In order for individuals to be motivated by more intrinsic concepts, the basic needs of that individual must be fulfilled (Maslow, 1943). Transformational leadership theory’s goal is to transform employees in an organization to be more motivated and successfully complete objectives (Siangchokyoo et al., 2020). Transformational leaders understand the worth of their employees and encourage them by acknowledging their worth (Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016). The researcher utilized the literature detailing these theories to solidify the emerging themes and results of the study.

As a whole, the leadership and administration of the college is seen in a very positive manner. Participants stated that they respect and value their administration. They do not see the organization as being power controlled. Participant 23 clarified this thought in the excerpt below.

I don't think it's administrative heavy. I mean, I do think there's a lot of meaningful work that happens and is encouraged to happen at the faculty level. I'm kind of contrasting it with my previous institution where I felt like there was a lot of top-down power.

When the participants were asked how or if their direct supervisor encourages their involvement in the strategic plan, 12 of the 23 participants noted that there is no encouragement directly related. Participant 10 stated, “I don’t know that’s even been brought up.” Participant 12 said, “I don't really think my supervisor involves specifically asking those questions like that.”

The other 11 participants indicated that they had not been involved in conversations pertaining to the strategic plan with their supervisor, however, they did feel as though some of the initiatives they are being asked to work on are items that are a result of the work from a strategic plan committee. An excerpt from Participant 09 included “She has asked me to be on
multiple committees. She will oftentimes have me stand in for her sometimes when she's busy with something else, so she must trust me enough to, you know, to do that.” Participant 23 expanded on the idea that even though conversations with the strategic plan wording may not be occurring, but work toward the goals of the plan is indeed being discussed.

I think we're constantly having discussions about probably the real kind of boots on the ground application of it with our students in a certain sense, like retention conversations or something that we have all the time. Like outcomes of what our students will understand at the end of our courses. I don't know if we've had direct conversations about the strategic plan where those words are mentioned, but I feel like it filters down to me through what I understand, is valued in my job and what I'm encouraged to do and supported to do.

Even though that result was evenly split among the participants, 22 of those participants stated that if asked by their direct supervisor to participate in a strategic project, they would indeed do so. The other individual noted that they would like to understand what the committee was about and ensure it was something they were passionate about before they made a final decision.

When asked specifically about how the President of the college encourages participation in strategic projects, the majority of participants stated in some way that the communication of the President is very different from that of their direct supervisor. The participants noted that there is no way that the President can meet one-on-one with each individual. They made references to encouragement through mass gatherings when that was allowed, as well as through emails and videos sent out to faculty and staff. One topic that was brought up multiple times is how the President encourages involvement through the simple task of leading by example.
Participant 04 stated, “He is leading the band and I want to be a good band member and follow.” Another participant used an illustration of leading by example when they referenced a flooding incident on the campus. Participant 03 said, “He literally went home, got rubber boots on and came back and helped push water.” Only one individual stated that they were not encouraged by the President. Participant 06 noted, “I think I’m just too far down the food chain for that.” Overall, the analysis confirms that the president does encourage individuals to participate in strategic projects and they see this through how he speaks of goals and objectives during gatherings as well as his ability to lead by example.

Not only were participants asked how their direct supervisor and president of the college encourage their participation in strategic projects, but they were also asked about overall motivators. Intrinsic motivation is the main motivation for these individuals. Intrinsic motivation is that which is internal of the individual, such as feelings of being helpful (Akingbola & van den Berg, 2016). The first motivator includes some type of appreciation, not just monetary. In the nonprofit sector, it is very common for employees to place much emphasis on intrinsic rewards rather than monetary rewards (Chen & Bozeman, 2012). Participant 01 stated, “Thank you is a terrific motivator.” Participant 16 stated, “Usually when you feel that you're appreciated, you tend to work harder. You are more motivated. I've worked a lot of jobs where you didn't really feel that, but I still always tried my best to help people.”

The second intrinsic motivator that is evident is that these individuals strive to help others. Participant 15 said, “It’s always for me the student success.” Interviewee Participant 13 commented, “My motivation is if it's going to make a difference to somebody.” Not only is the motivation about helping students directly at the college, but also people within the community. Participant 17 stated, “I am passionate about the people that are in my community. So that is
why I would want to be a part of something.” There were other motivators mentioned in the data, including administration support, monetary rewards, and feeling as though their work adds value to the organization.

There are two conclusions from this theme. One is that employees are motivated by their superiors in organizations when they feel as if their opinions are valuable and respected. One way this is shown is by management asking individuals for their participation. Employees see this as their supervisors believing in them and in their abilities. The second conclusion is that employees within this organization are highly motivated by intrinsic methods. This includes the satisfaction of helping others as well as appreciating verbal affirmation of their tasks and duties.

**Levels of Empowerment.** The level to which individuals feel empowered to participate in decision-making differed among the interviews. This topic goes deeper than that of actual motivation, which has been discussed. Questions were asked by the researcher to determine if individuals were ever encouraged or discouraged to make decisions, not only about strategic projects, within their organization. This was not as specific as to note the level of leadership in which the encouragement or discouragement results, but more of a broad spectrum.

The question specifically asked the participants if they have ever felt encouraged or discouraged to make decisions within the organization. The researcher’s initial thought is that a clear encouraged or discouraged answer would be the majority. However, this was not the case. Most individuals chose to state that they really never felt discouraged, but also did not feel extremely encouraged. There were some individuals that said they were neutral on the question. If interviewees did not feel discouraged, they would revert back to say that they were encouraged due to there being no other option than those two provided. These individuals did give additional supporting information of their stance.
One additional finding concerning decision-making is the difference in the perception of faculty and staff. When staff were asked if they are encouraged or discouraged to make decisions in the organization, 50% solidly stated they were encouraged, 7% discouraged, and 43% were neutral of stated that they were not discouraged. Faculty, on the other hand, resulted in only 25% stating that they were encouraged and the remaining 75% were either neutral or not discouraged.

According to Nelson (2017), there are six approaches that potentially increase employee engagement which includes clear direction, good communication, involving employees in decisions, increasing employee flexibility, developing teams and communities, and rewarding good performance. The theme of empowerment would coincide with the approach of involving employees in decisions, no matter the level of decision-making. Involving lower-level employees in key decision-making is not something that every organization includes in their culture or comes naturally. However, if leadership in an organization can see a positive outcome when including all levels of employees in decision-making, they may be more likely to change that culture and empower their employees at a greater level. It is proven that when decisions are made by management and employees at lower levels, the overall success of the organization increases (Tian & Zhai, 2019).

As stated, the questions in the interviews were concentrated on being either encouraged or discouraged to make decisions. One trend that was noted during the analysis was the amount of impact that the direct supervisors of these individuals had on their final response. If participants stated immediately that they were encouraged to make decisions, many times the discussion continued to state how much they enjoyed working for their supervisor or how their supervisor really made them feel as though their opinion matters. Those individuals who did not
feel encouraged did not give specific reasons for not being discouraged. Those who were neutral also answered in short statements with little elaboration.

Of the 23 participants, 10 felt they were encouraged to make decisions, 8 were neutral, 4 were not discouraged, but were not encouraged, and 1 individual felt discouraged. Of the 10 individuals who were encouraged, many of them gave examples of their supervisors being supportive and requesting their assistance and expertise. Participant 02 specifically mentioned higher leadership positions and stated “They want our honest feedback and that there's no repercussions for giving good, honest feedback. So, I think that alone encourages you to say, well, this is what I really think about this subject.” Participant 18 also gave information concerning being taken seriously stating “I don't know if I've ever been asked about the strategic plan in general, but I do know if I ever brought any ideas to the table, I feel confident that they will be taken seriously.” Participant 14 added that they are strongly encouraged by stating the quoted information below.

I've always felt encouraged. In fact, I think we're encouraged strongly in some cases, you know, to help in different areas. I've had a pretty good track record of having supervisors during my employment at the college over all the years I've been there that I really respect.

Of the interviews, over 50% of the participants noted that they were either neutral on the topic or “not discouraged”. Most of the individuals answering in this manner did not provide in-depth discussion on the topic even when prompted. Their responses were very short and concise. However, Participant 22 gave some additional information, stating “That is kind of neutral. I've not really felt discouraged about it, but I've never really felt encouraged by anyone to make any kind of significant decisions.”
One individual noted that they have been both encouraged and discouraged depending on their direct supervisor at the time. That individual was included in the neutral population due to giving examples of both situations. Participant 08 stated the information below.

I did have some supervisor positions over me that made me feel like I was not allowed to speak my mind. Or if I did, my ideas would immediately be shot down or not talked about. Once that moved on and new supervisors came into play, it was almost like a sense of freedom, and I have felt blessed to be able to share my opinions.

Only one individual stated that they feel discouraged to make decisions in the organization. This participant noted that it wasn’t because of something particular that has happened, but what has not been said or demonstrated. The discussion from Participant 06 included “I think it's because of the way that we fall in the organizational chart, that it is assumed that the most executive person that we fall under knows everything there is to know about what we do.”

Overall, the conversations surrounding individuals having a sense of empowerment to make decisions within the organization were either positive or neutral. From those discussions, it was concluded that the level of empowerment is different among various individuals, and that can be a direct result of their relationship with their direct supervisor. The demographic data were reviewed and showed that 50% of the staff member participants felt encouraged to make decisions when only 14.29% of the faculty participants felt encouraged to make decisions. The division in which the individual is employed was not directly related to the results of this theme.

**Time Constraints.** The research concludes that strategic goals should be SMART goals, which include specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time bound (Oleksandra et al., 2019). The time boundness of strategic goals was of concern to the researcher. Strategic projects
must be time bound, but this timeframe can be very minimal or very large in terms of scope. Therefore, questions were posed to the interviewees as to the amount of time that they have spent working on a strategic committee or how much time do they think others who are on a committee spend per week. As Chad (2015) stated, in a nonprofit organization, if employees do not see the main benefit for the proposed changes, they view the cost of their time as higher than the participation in a strategic project. Therefore, questions were asked about time to determine if this is indeed a reason that non-executives would choose not to participate in strategic projects.

In this study, out of the 23 individuals interviewed, 15 estimated that participation on a strategic committee would entail 5 hours or less per week and eight participants estimated that participation on a strategic committee would entail more than 5 hours per week. Of those same 23 individuals, 11 stated that they would be able to make that time estimate work along with their normal job duties, four stated that they would be able to do so sometimes through the year but not at certain specific times when their job was most time consuming, and seven individuals indicated that they would not be able to fit in time for a strategic project within their normal duties.

The expectation was that time constraints would heavily affect the participation among low-level employees in strategic projects. The research data suggests that 68% of the participants would indeed take the time to participate in strategic projects if at all possible. Those who stated that they sometimes were willing to participate, but noted that there are times throughout the year that participation would not be possible. When asked if they would participate in a strategic committee if asked by their direct supervisor, 95% stated they would participate. This second scenario did not take time into consideration, but just simply asked if the individual would participate when asked.
Individuals who answered a solid yes to having enough time provided short and concise answers. Those who stated that they would be able to participate sometimes or not at all provided more detailed explanations. For example, Participant 19 stated “Yeah. I think with my job, the timing is kind of crazy at times. In the summer when it kind of dies down for me a little bit, I think I absolutely could.” Participant 21 also stated that they could participate sometimes added “That depends on which semester we're in and like this current semester. Absolutely not, because I've got six courses that I'm teaching.” Participants who stated that they would not have the time to participate, brought up scenarios of small staffing concerns and workload.

The data for this theme were expected by the researcher to weigh heavier on time being a major factor of non-engagement. However, in this organization, the employees seem to have an overwhelming willingness to help. If asked to participate, they would try to make the time in their schedule to take part in assisting with strategic projects.

**Absence of Knowledge.** The theme concerning an absence of knowledge was an outlier as far as the literature that was reviewed. This theme appeared in four specific areas of questioning. First, it was evident in the area concerning how the president of the college encourages strategic participation. Secondly, it was brought up during discussions concerning the culture of the organization. The next area that showed a lack of knowledge was around the details of the strategic project, specifically how all areas fit in the big picture. Lastly, it was mentioned concerning a presence or absence of specific professional development.

When asked how the president of the college encourages strategic participation, many individuals related back to various emails and gatherings where the president would update the organization at a high level on the strategic plan. However, one individual noted a new program in the organization for onboarding employees. The participant provided information that her
answer to the question would have been very different prior to the onboarding program. In saying this, in the future, professional development programs such as this will change the data used for analysis in this study. Participant 17 gave the below information.

If you'd asked me this a week ago, I would say none. But due to the onboarding training that we're going through, I definitely feel like there is that connection there now. And he was present in the meeting. He spoke about our strategic plan.

While discussing the culture of Community College A, two individuals showed concern for a disconnect between faculty and staff. They made comments to suggest that not knowing or understanding other areas of the college can cause low engagement on committees. The two participants made note that they would feel more engaged if there were additional staff concentrated professional development sessions in the organization to aid in their knowledge. Participant 13 gave the following explanation.

I think there's a disconnect in the faculty and staff. I think there needs to be more team building, when it comes to what staff has to do to help faculty and what faculty even do. I think that staff are not aware of what else is on your teachers and professors. But on the other hand, I don't think that the faculty understands the back end of what staff has to do to comply with our policies.

Participants were asked if they were familiar with the strategic planning process at Community College A and what they perceived were the goals of the strategic plan. Many participants stated that they thought it was about students and retention, however, they did not feel as though they could confidently answer the question. Various individuals made comments to the effect that they really need to look up information about the strategic plan or would love to hear more about the details. The participants felt an absence of knowledge which was preventing
them from being confident about the plan or personally involved. Many individuals also stated that their role was not involved in the plan or that they did not work with students. Their assumption was that since their perception of the strategic plan was about students and retention, that if their job did not touch students, they as individuals do not impact the strategic plan. When asked if they thought they had the knowledge and experience to benefit a strategic committee, Participant 03 stated, “Probably not. I don't know that much about it, and I'm not working with students anymore, so I really don't keep up with that side of things anymore.”

Professional development was a topic discussed in various parts of the interviews. When participants were unfamiliar with a topic or uncomfortable about a question, many did refer back to professional development. There were three mentions of a need for staff directed development specifically. There were also two participants who feel a disconnect between faculty and staff and stated that professional development to aid in understanding various parts of the college would promote more engagement. According to one participant, this is occurring for new employees through an onboarding process.

These references to an absence of knowledge were widespread throughout the data. This was a topic that was not expected but did run through the various themes. From the interview data, it seems that by having the needed knowledge to participate or by specific training availabilities, the encouragement level of individuals and their confidence is greater.

**Representation and Visualization of the Data**

The themes discussed are supported with data from interviews with 23 individuals. Questionnaire data were also included for triangulation which supports these themes. The visual representations are located in Appendix E and F of this document. The visual data are being
presented by interview questions. The following section (relationship of the findings) will relate the interview questions back to the research questions and the themes.

**Interview Data Visualization.** The figures located in Appendix E show a graphical view of the data collected for each interview question. Information is presented in figures, including charts and word clouds. The charts include data that were analyzed as percentages of the whole. Word cloud figures are also included. These are graphical representations of words by their frequency. Words that are larger and bolder are words and themes that were most noted in the data. The word cloud figures represent questions within the interviews that provided additional information as to why someone stated a particular answer to a previous question.

**Questionnaire Data Visualization.** The figures located in Appendix F show a graphical view of the data collected for each questionnaire item used for triangulation. Information is presented in figures as charts and word clouds. The charts include data that were analyzed as percentages of the whole. Word cloud figures are also included. These are graphical representations of words by their frequency. Words that are larger and bolder are words and themes that were most noted in the data. The word cloud figures represent questions that provided additional information as to why someone stated a particular answer to a previous question.

**Relationship of the Findings**

The study conducted resulted in various findings and six main themes. The data were gathered by asking specific questions that were drafted to answer three main research questions. These themes and findings were related to the conceptual framework constructed by the researcher and similarities to the literature research were noted. This section will discuss the relationship of the findings to these initial research thoughts and processes.
Relationship to Research Questions. For this qualitative study, there were three main research questions developed. The first research question involved two additional parts for a total of five questions and sub-questions. Below are the questions that this study presented.

RQ1: Why is there minimal engagement of employees other than those in leadership positions (President, Vice President, Dean, and Director) in strategic projects?

RQ1a: What are specific reasons that mid to low-level working individuals feel that their expertise is not needed or wanted in strategic project decision-making?

RQ1b: What organizational qualities create a desire for average working individuals to feel as if their involvement is needed and wanted in strategic projects?

RQ2: What actions are taken by leaders (President, Vice President, Dean, and Director) that contribute to the engagement effort of all other employees and stakeholders?

RQ3: Why would an employee at any level in an organization choose not to be engaged in strategic projects?

To determine answers to the first research questions and sub-questions, the researcher wanted to determine first that the individuals were familiar with current strategic projects at the organization. Once that was established, participants were asked if they (being non-executive employees) were on any strategic project committees. The data show that only 35% of the individuals in the interviews were participating in a strategic project. Of those participating, all were asked by their supervisor or someone in leadership to participate. The question was also asked if an individual, even if not currently on a project, would participate if asked by their supervisor.
Factors that were evident in the data on why participants at the non-executive level would not participate were narrowed down to two main items. The main item was that participants were not asked to be part of a strategic committee. The second factor was the participants did not know that they had the knowledge necessary to fully understand the strategic plan or that they did not have any additional knowledge that would be helpful. This brought up discussions around a need for professional development around the strategic projects to become more familiar. For example, it was brought up multiple times that participants viewed the plan as being student-centered. They would state that they do not work with students, so they did not see that they could add value.

All but one individual stated that they would indeed participate if directly asked. This was due to overall respect for their leadership and a sense of accomplishment for someone acknowledging the individual has a skill set that is beneficial. When individuals were asked to participate, they feel as though their opinion matters and is wanted by leadership.

One other concept that motivates individuals to participate in extra duties such as serving on strategic committees in this organization is the culture. Interview participants noted the culture as caring, student-centered, like family, encouraging, and nurturing. As participants elaborated on the culture, they were very positive. They were asked if this culture, as they stated, would be motivated to participate in strategic projects. The interviewees stated that these factors and descriptions of the culture indeed would motivate them to be more engaged and help with strategic projects. To these individuals, the mission and goals of the college are to help others, and that part of the culture indeed motivates them to participate.

The second research question changed from the individual’s own reflection to that of those in leadership positions. This specifically asked about the participant’s supervisor and the
Community College A president. The majority of comments concerning this topic were very positive in nature. There was a great sense of respect for leadership.

Concerning an individual’s direct supervisor, the participants spoke about how they felt encouraged by their supervisor directly encouraging them, asking them questions, having conversations about strategic projects, and requesting input. Overall, there was a sense of feeling needed and appreciated that the individuals craved. They had an overarching willingness to please their supervisor.

The same was true concerning the president of the college. Their main engagement with the president included discussions of mass emails, videos, luncheons, and meetings. They exuded appreciation that the individual in this position tries to communicate and ensure that individuals are aware at least at a high level of what is planned. They also expressed that they feel encouraged to participate in strategic activities when they see the engagement and excitement from the highest level of leadership in the organization.

The final research question sought to understand why any non-executive individual in an organization would choose not to participate in a strategic project. The answer to that question is that there are not many reasons at all that an individual would choose not to participate. The research reflected the main reason is that they are not asked or do not feel as though they have the appropriate knowledge or expertise. When asked if the perceived time on a committee would prevent an individual from participating, the overwhelming majority did not see the time needed as being a determining factor. Some did indicate that during certain times in the year, they would not be able to fully participate, but it was not an outstanding issue of time commitment.

**Relationship to Conceptual Framework.** Two main concepts and two supporting theories have been noted for this qualitative study. The concepts include a positive relationship
between successful initiatives and employee engagement and a positive relationship between meeting strategic goals and organizations investing in employees as intellectual capital. The first concept is supported by Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and the second is supported by transformational leadership theory.

The study presented findings that those individuals who were part of a strategic committee did feel as though they have added value and aided in the success of the goals of their committee. They felt as if they belong to the organization and already had buy-in established to allow them to be an asset to the team. This is an example of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.

These individuals had their basic needs and psychological needs met in the organization enough to want to be creative and accomplish additional tasks to better the organization.

The interviews also proved that as supervisors and leaders invest in their employees, the employees are motivated to participate in additional duties. The simple act of asking an employee to be on a strategic committee gave the employee confidence and satisfaction that their skills and abilities are noticed and appreciated. This concept is supported by transformational leadership theory and the idea that leaders in an organization can and indeed influence their subordinates.

**Relationship to Anticipated Themes.** Due to the literature reviewed, the researcher expected to see various themes in the research. Some of those themes include the idea that employees who have basic needs met tend to be more motivated to assist in strategic projects, employees who are most motivated are those in organizations who see their employees as intellectual capital, and the main reason individuals participate in additional duties in a nonprofit organization may be more intrinsic in nature. These were overall themes that were expected in the research.
These themes were indeed part of the findings. Those individuals who participated in strategic projects felt as though the organization benefited from their ideas, and there were individuals who were comfortable in their position and with the organization as a whole. These were also people who valued the opinions and acknowledgment of their supervisors greatly. One recurring theme throughout all the interviews was a sense of intrinsic gratification. These employees ultimately were motivated by a common goal of helping students and making their organization better because they believe in the goals and mission.

**Relationship to the Literature.** The main ideas and topics reviewed in the literature included an overview of nonprofit organizations, strategic decision-making, employee engagement, and lack of employee engagement in organizations. This qualitative study was conducted at Community College A, which is a nonprofit community college in North Carolina. The literature reviewed specifically targeted educational institutions and church organizations. Therefore, this study indeed related to the literature focus in that manner.

The interviewees were questioned about their involvement and engagement on strategic committees within the organization as well as their ability to make decisions in the organization. The questions asked by the individuals provided insight as to what would cause an employee to be engaged and participate in strategic projects and reasons that would cause them to choose not to be a part of a strategic committee. Therefore, the themes of the literature were present throughout the research and findings.

**Relationship to the Problem.** The general problem addressed is the minimal non-executive employee engagement in strategic project implementation, resulting in failed initiatives. From this study, there were some direct relationships to this problem statement, but also some ideas that were not expected. The main reason that there is minimal non-executive
employee engagement in strategic projects in this nonprofit organization studied is that they are not directly asked to participate. Those individuals who stated they were asked to participate were indeed motivated to do so. These individuals were committed to the culture and goals of the organization, which also motivated them to want to help when asked.

The initiatives that were discussed by these individuals who participated in a strategic project were not failing. Initiatives currently being implemented were noted as being on track and thus far successful. Unfortunately, this organization is in the implementation stage of the strategic projects, and there is no concrete data at this time concerning the success or failure of the initiative. The individuals who were interviewed and were a part of these committees, however, seem to think that they are indeed making a difference in their organization and community even though the initiatives are still active.

**Summary of the Findings**

This qualitative study set out to answer three main research questions detailed in Section 1 of this document. The questions were developed based on an overall business problem concerning the lack of non-executive engagement in strategic projects. There were 23 interviews conducted at Community College A in Western North Carolina. These interviews were completed with participants who were faculty and staff with a job title level lower than that of Director or Dean. A questionnaire was also sent to other individuals who met the participant criteria for triangulation purposes. There were 42 individuals who provided information in the form of the questionnaire.

It is known that the engagement level of all employees in an organization can impact the overall competitive advantage and success of an organization (Taneja et al., 2015). Therefore, it is important to understand why some employees may choose not to be engaged in their
organization and understand ways in which leadership can transform the culture to encourage engagement. The interviews in this study provided information around this topic.

From the research, there were six main themes that evolved. These included participation requests, culture of care, motivation and employee relations, levels of empowerment, time constraints, and an absence of knowledge. It was found that employees in the organization were not opposed to being engaged in strategic projects. The overall conclusion was that they were not participating because they had not been asked by anyone to participate. A request for participation is what they were looking for to become more engaged. The participants repeatedly mentioned the importance of the culture at the organization and the positive relationships with their supervisors. These positive relationships and positive culture of community and student support provided the employees with a sense of empowerment and a willingness to be of assistance in any area possible. The interviewees also mentioned in some cases that their lack of participation was not due to things such as time constraints but could be due to not having enough knowledge to aid in projects or the assumption that their particular role at the college was not affected by the strategic plan.

Overall, the findings of the study indeed answered the research questions posed. In this organization, there is not necessarily a very low level of engagement. Of the 23 interviews conducted, eight individuals were participants on a strategic committee. This is 35% which was a higher percentage than what has been found in the literature. According to Harter (2020), employment engagement had risen to over 30% and that percentage was fluctuating due to social changes in the United States. The analysis of this information and conclusion from the researcher is that the reason for the higher level of participation than expected in this organization is due to the overall culture of the organization. The caring culture and support from leadership have
created an environment where more individuals are empowered to aid in decision-making and feel as if their skill set is that which can help with the success of the overall strategic plan.

**Application to Professional Practice**

Strategic projects are an important part of business and sustaining competitive advantage in market segments. Organizations that have a clear plan and understanding of the overall goals and objectives are able to utilize strategic planning to develop short-range and long-range plans for their organization. In order to do this well, these organizations must include individuals from all levels of the organization in the planning process. Nonprofit organizations are not exempt from this procedure (Rana et al., 2017). Therefore, it is important to understand why individuals at any level within an organization would participate or would not participate in the strategic process. In understanding these things, organizations can better adopt strategies of recruitment and appointment of individuals onto strategic committees for greater success and greater engagement.

**Improving General Business Practice**

This qualitative research case focused on the engagement of lower-level employees in strategic projects in a nonprofit organization. Some organizations are formed in order to make a profit and others are formed as nonprofit. However, these organizations require similar business processes to remain as entities in their perspective markets. Strategic planning processes and projects are essential to the growth of any organization (Farahmand, 2016). Without continual planning and successful strategies, organizations may cease to exist. This is why successful strategic projects are of utmost importance in the business field.

In order for strategic projects to be most successful and effective, it is imperative to include input from many levels within the organization (Cooke-Davies, 2017). Understanding
that projects are most effective when various levels in an organization participate creates a need to understand why some organizations do not include lower-level employees in these decisions or why a lower-level employee in an organization would choose not to participate in strategic projects. This study was developed to help determine what engages lower-level employees to participate in strategic projects or what may deter employees from being engaged. This information will help to improve the strategic planning process in nonprofit organizations and therefore create additional organization growth and success.

The research conducted is relevant to nonprofit organizations, specifically in the area of community colleges. The focus of the research was the engagement in strategic projects within the organization and participation on those strategic committees. Employees who participated in the study were asked questions concerning their experience with the strategic planning process at their place of employment. The research questions were formed to discuss why there is the minimal engagement of lower-level employees in strategic planning, how leadership actions impact employee engagement, and reasons that may deter an employee from participating in strategic projects.

Organizations can utilize the findings of this research to better understand how to engage their employees in strategic projects. Specific themes rose from the findings that can assist a strategic planning group in determining the most effective way to involve various employees throughout the organization. The findings of the research provide motivational ideas and specific ways and reasons that employees in this organization feel motivated to participate in strategic projects. Leaders within organizations can utilize these motivational ideas and implement actions to increase their own employee participation.
The theories directly related to the research include Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs as well as transformational leadership theory. Both of these theories can aid organizations in improving their general business practice. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs helps leadership understand the ranking of an individual’s needs. The theory makes the realization that if an individual’s lowest needs are not being met, it is difficult for that individual to express more of their creativity and willingness to participate in anything other than their required tasks. As stated by Tulika and Prakash (2016), for employees to reach a point of self-actualization, their basic needs must be met first. Leadership can benefit from knowing this theory and applying this theory to their organizations. As organizations meet the basic needs of their employees, the employees then have a chance to acknowledge more advanced needs, which can ultimately aid the organization and stem creativity and a willingness to participate in various projects in the company.

Organizations can also benefit from the knowledge of the transformational leadership theory. The impact that leadership has on the employees within an organization is high. Leaders in organizations influence and shape the individuals that work for them (Ruben & Gigliotti, 2016). As seen in the findings of this research, participation in strategic projects was directly related to leadership and the respect that an employee has for their supervisor. Organizations must understand the importance of leadership and the role that leadership plays in the encouragement of employees and their willingness to participate in strategic projects.

**Potential Application Strategies**

The findings of this research show significant importance in the relationship between those in leadership and lower-level employees. The research suggests there is a positive relationship between employees who have great respect for their supervisor and being willing to serve on a strategic project committee. From this study, it was found that most individuals
employed at the location studied would indeed participate in strategic projects if simply asked to do so by their supervisor. Of the individuals who responded that they were a part of a strategic committee, it was because they were asked by someone in a leadership position to participate. Therefore, this is an important finding that can improve business practice if applied in the organization. By knowing that most employees would gladly participate in strategic planning if only asked gives leadership in organizations insight into determining better ways to invite individuals to participate.

If organizations are waiting on employees to volunteer or are outspoken about being on a committee, the participation of those individuals will not be as likely. Organizations can make a conscious effort to directly communicate with individuals they perceive might have insight into particular projects from varying levels within the organization. Leadership could work to determine a way for individuals to be directly asked to participate by their manager or direct supervisor. In that case, the participation of lower-level employees would increase, and all levels of the organization would be represented in the decision-making process.

The findings of this research uncover the importance of the culture within a nonprofit organization. Many individuals stated in the interview process that they are willing to participate in strategic projects to help their organization. They believe in their organization and the mission for which the organization exists. Therefore, leadership in organizations must continually strive to ensure the culture and mission of their organization are known by all employees and is one that their employees believe in and support. This can be accomplished through the acknowledgement of employees when they achieve goals. The culture and mission can also be discussed on a yearly basis with employees to ensure these employees do understand what the organization is out to accomplish and how they individually are a part of that greater good.
By understanding the impact of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, organizations can begin by reviewing the basic needs levels within their company. They must ensure that they are indeed meeting those basic needs to allow for their employees to express their full potential. This can include working with human resources to ensure wages and working hours are appropriate as well as closely monitoring working conditions and ensuring the organization is safe for all employees. These are some of the basic needs that must be met first in order for individuals to reach self-actualization.

The findings of the study also support the Transformational Leadership Theory. As previously stated, the individuals in the study were very likely to participate in strategic decision-making specifically if they were asked by their supervisor or direct leadership. This supports the idea that managers and leaders do have an impact on the engagement level of their employees. When leaders empower their employees, engagement increases (Holland, 2016). In understanding this theory, organizations can use this information to ensure their leaders are interacting and involving their direct reports in decision-making and strategic planning. This can be a professional development area for those in leadership within organizations to understand this idea in more depth and be able to implement it within their perspective areas.

**Summary of Application to Professional Practice**

This qualitative study was conducted to better understand the engagement of lower-level employees in strategic projects. The research specifically targeted nonprofit organizations. All organizations require short-term and long-term planning in order to be competitive in their perspective markets. This includes nonprofit organizations. By ensuring employees of all levels are engaged in strategic projects increases the impact and success of strategic projects and strategic plans within an organization (Cooke-Davies, 2017). The findings of this study produced
some evident data as to how employees are encouraged and why they choose to be engaged in strategic projects. Encouragement from leadership to be engaged is a main idea that surfaced and can be implemented in any organization to improve lower-level employee engagement. This is supported by theories such as Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and Transformational Leadership Theory.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

This research was specifically conducted in a nonprofit community college and the sample population was individuals below the level of dean or director. There are additional possibilities for studies that could expand on the information gathered in this research. The first recommendation would be to perform studies within different types of nonprofit organizations to determine if the results are similar or if there is a difference in findings depending on the type of nonprofit organization.

Next, there is the opportunity to conduct the same type of research, but with the opposite sample population. For example, the study could be reversed to only include those employees with a title of or above dean and director. This would provide a possibly different perspective and could add to the body of knowledge. Another recommendation would be to perform the same study at multiple community colleges in varying geographical locations. This would further solidify the findings and determine if the geographical location and community college size cause any change in the results.

**Reflections**

The topic of lower-level employee engagement in strategic projects was chosen because I was very close to the topic. The organization in which I am employed was going through a large strategic initiative. It was noticed that many individuals in leadership roles were spending much
of their time on strategic committees, but it was not apparent at the time that individuals in lower-level positions within the organization were participating. This research was completed to determine if this was indeed the case and if so, what was the underlying cause of lower-level employees not participating or being engaged in strategic projects.

In conducting the research, not only did I learn more about the organization in which I work, but also about the overall research process as well as information that can support me as a leader in my organization. This has been a very detailed process in which I have benefited in many ways. This research has given me opportunities for growth in not only my professional career, but in my personal life as well.

**Personal and Professional Growth**

During this research, I have grown in many ways. I know that the work leading up to this research and the research project itself has given me new perspectives and new knowledge. This knowledge is that which I can use in my personal and professional life.

I have grown personally through this process in various ways. First, there is the growth in my patience and thought process. Research is not something that can be forced or even hurried along. It is a detailed process that requires time and thorough thought. At the start of the process, I was an individual who tried to rush my thoughts and words in my documentation. As the process continued, I became an individual who accepted the need to walk away from my work when needed. I learned that a small bit of time to think and reflect without typing is necessary for me to do my best work. For me, this meant patience. This was not a virtue that would have been considered one of my strengths in the past. However, due to this research process, I have been able to understand the importance of patience to a much greater extent and utilize patience in my everyday life with my family as well as with the completion of important tasks.
The second personal item of growth has been time management. As a wife, mother, daughter, employee, and student, I have learned that my time must be managed closely. I must be able to complete all of my personal duties while maintaining excellence in all areas. When you begin dividing up your time, you quickly realize and begin to prioritize what is most important. I have loved this process and my DBA journey, but I also had to ensure that my family came first. There were times that I would go a week without completing any dissertation tasks due to my children being sick or other family-related issues. There were also times that my job was very busy and required extra time from me. This all required me to understand my time and ensure that no time is wasted. My time management skills have improved due to this research.

Professionally, this research has helped me in two specific ways. First, the content that I worked on in courses leading up to this research has given me additional knowledge on topics that I teach my community college students. As a business and information technology instructor, I have a great appreciation for learning new and exciting things to share with my students. These in-depth courses and opportunities for research in those courses provided me with further knowledge to share with my students and enhanced my research skills which ultimately is making me a better instructor. I consider this DBA process excellent professional development for me as an educator. As stated by Severs (2017), when educators take ownership of their professional development, it can be more effective.

This research opportunity has also enhanced my knowledge of strategic projects and employee engagement. Although I am not a dean or director in my organization, I do have direct reports. This research has shown me how important leadership roles are in an organization and how easily those in leadership can influence or enhance engagement. The research focused on strategic projects; however, the transformational leadership theory encompasses all processes in
an organization. I can apply these ideas to the projects that my team and I work on throughout the year and increase our overall enthusiasm and engagement as well as that of my students.

**Biblical Perspective**

The way we as individuals see the world varies. Those who are followers of Christ work to see the world in a Christian worldview. As Christians believe in the Bible, they choose for God’s holy word to be the basis and foundation. They utilize biblical principles in everyday life and work.

Wallace (2007) provided examples of varying virtues including Aristotelian (e.g., courage, temperance, generosity, pride, friendliness, etc.), traditional Christian (e.g., chastity, liberality, humility, patience, kindness, etc.), and Servant Leadership (e.g., agapao love, vision, trust, empowerment, service, etc.). Each of these three types of virtues differs in its overall goal or idea. Human society automatically looks at the Aristotelian virtues as a standard. As Christians label virtues, they typically begin with those listed as traditional Christian. However, as Christians take on a bigger thought process, they arrive at servant leadership virtues. These are those which transform an individual’s view of the world and their purpose into the fulfillment of God’s ultimate plan. This is not only in their personal lives, but in all aspects of their being.

With a Christian worldview, individuals can see their occupation or work as part of God’s plan. They can relate everyday tasks to scripture and understand how they are similar in nature. The two main ideas of this research are employee engagement and strategic projects. There are multiple examples of these topics in scripture. Two that stand out in these areas include the work of Nehemiah as well as the work of Joseph.

Nehemiah is an example of a transformational leader. Nehemiah had an extremely important professional position. Nehemiah was a cup bearer for the king, which meant the king’s
fate was in Nehemiah’s hand. This position was respected and valued, much like leadership positions in organizations and the business world today.

Even though Nehemiah had a respected position, he realized that he was being called to lead in another direction. This direction was not something that everyone would quickly agree with nor choose to help. However, Nehemiah was determined. He asked the king for a time away from his position and went on his way to work on his new mission. This mission was to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah said, “Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace” (Holy Bible, *New International Version*, 1978/2011, Nehemiah 2:17).

When the process began, Nehemiah did not have many engaged employees. However, when individuals saw the work Nehemiah was doing and that he had a solid plan and goal, he received assistance. This is employee engagement and transformational leadership. As a leader, Nehemiah presented a strong and clear goal. When he did this, others became engaged in the work and the mission at hand. Nehemiah eventually had many project teams working on various parts of the walls. The scripture states that priests worked to rebuild the Sheep Gate, men of Jericho built the joined section, sons of Hassenaah rebuilt the Fish Gate, Meremoth repaired a section, and the list continues (Holy Bible, *New International Version*, 1978/2011, Nehemiah 3).

All of these individuals were engaged in their work under the leadership of Nehemiah. This display of leadership is seen in organizations today as transformational leadership. Leaders have a clear vision and mission, which then engages their employees in those goals and the success of the overall project.

The second biblical perspective is that of Joseph, which relates to the business topic of strategic projects. One way for strategies to be successful is to ensure that they are not only planned well but carried out well (Cascella, 2002). That is something that Joseph was sure to do.
After a hard childhood, Joseph found himself as an interpreter of dreams to Pharaoh. Pharaoh had a dream that could not be interpreted by others. Joseph proceeded to tell Pharaoh that his dreams were quite significant. Joseph said, “Seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt, but seven years of famine will follow them” (Holy Bible, New International Version, 1978/2011, Genesis 41:29).

From that interpretation, Pharaoh needed a good strategic planner. He knew he needed someone wise who understood the overall mission and could create a plan and carry out that plan for the well-being of their land. Joseph was the chosen one. Pharaoh chose Joseph to be in charge of this plan and he indeed carried it out well. Without thoughtful planning and strategies, Egypt would have been devastated by the famine years. This is similar to business. Without proper planning and clear strategic projects with good leadership, organizations can be devastated.

**Summary of Reflections**

After completing any process, reflection is necessary. After completing this research, I have reflected on many things. I have reflected on my personal growth and how the task of research has created me to be a more patient and time-conscious individual. I have also understood that working toward my DBA and going through the research process has developed my skill set and knowledge in my field. I am better able to teach my own students in the field of business due to my gained knowledge from this program. My skills as a leader have also improved due to having a better understanding of transformational leadership and how leadership roles impact employees. I am now able to see these areas of growth and directly relate them back to scripture and successful individuals in the Bible who worked to fulfill the ultimate will of God.
Summary of Section 3

This section concentrated on the findings and reflections of the study. The findings portion of the section included detailed information about the participant pool as well as the six themes which emerged from the research. The six themes include participation requests from leadership, culture of care, motivation and employee relations, levels of empowerment, time constraints, and absence of knowledge. These themes emerged from the 23 interviews conducted as well as the 42 questionnaires that were answered for triangulation.

The data gathered was collected in the form of interviews and electronic questionnaire data. The data were then analyzed and placed into figure format for easier review. The findings were tied directly to the literature reviewed. The findings were also related to the overall business problem and research questions of the study.

The application to professional practice from this research is evident. The findings provide information that can improve general business practice and specific application strategies were noted. There are additional study opportunities related to this research which were identified and detailed in the documentation.

This section concluded with information concerning reflection. Reflection is necessary for gaining knowledge. This section allowed for details on personal, professional, and religious reflection. There is substantial personal and professional growth noted in this section. There is also information, which provides a connection to biblical principles and teachings to the research conducted. This section concludes the research documentation.

Summary and Study Conclusions

This qualitative case study focused on the engagement of lower-level employees in strategic projects. The study was completed in a non-profit community college in North
Carolina. The research revealed six apparent themes. The largest of these themes being related to the culture of the organization and leadership. It was found that the engagement of low-level employees in this organization is higher than was seen in the literature. The individuals participating in the study felt a strong sense of commitment to the mission of the college. The employees also noted on many occasions their loyalty and respect for their supervisors. This encouraged their participation in duties above and beyond their normal workload.

Currently, this organization is engaging its employees by ensuring the overall goals and objectives are clear. As with any process, additional engagement would be an asset to the organization. As found in the study, this is accomplished through continual culture building and continued emphasis on employee empowerment by leadership.
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Appendix A: Permission Request

October 13, 2020

Dear College President:

As a graduate student in the School of Business at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The title of my research project is Non-Executive Engagement in Strategic Projects, and the purpose of my research is to determine the level of engagement of non-executive employees in strategic decision-making.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at your community college.

Participants will be asked to participate in a face-to-face or virtual interview. Once the interviews are complete and data saturation is met, another group of participants will be presented an online questionnaire to aid in triangulation of the study data. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval.

Sincerely,

Melonie Kilby
DBA Student
Liberty University
Appendix B: Interview Participant Consent

Title of the Project: Non-Executive Engagement in Strategic Projects

Principal Investigator: Melonie Kilby, DBA Student, Liberty University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Invitation to be Part of a Research Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be a full-time employee of Community College A and employed at a level below that of Dean/Director. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the study about and why is it being done?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The purpose of the study is to explore and better understand the engagement level of non-executive employees in strategic projects. The study will be conducted within Community College A in Western North Carolina. The data collected will allow the researcher to determine why individuals choose to be engaged in strategic projects or why they choose not to be engaged.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>What will happen if you take part in this study?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Participate in a virtual or face-to-face interview. This should take approximately 30 minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Participate in a virtual or face-to-face follow up interview. This should take approximately 15 minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o This interview would be conducted to present the participant with the transcribed information from the initial interview to ensure it is accurate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How could you or others benefit from this study?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include the sharing of those themes and data groupings to benefit Community College A in their strategic process and therefore aid employees and students long-term. The findings from this study may also be generalized to benefit other organizations in the nonprofit sector, specifically community colleges.

<table>
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<th>What risks might you experience from being in this study?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The risks in this study are minimal, meaning they are equal to the risks one would encounter in everyday life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
<th>How will personal information be protected?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data are shared.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of numeric or alphabetic codes. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.

- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted. Any hard copy data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and shredded after the three year period is over.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

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

Participants in the interview process will be entered into a random drawing for a $100 Amazon gift card. One individual will be randomly selected for the gift. The drawing will take place when data saturation is reached, and the interview process is complete.

### Does the researcher have any conflicts of interest?

The researcher serves as a faculty chair at Community College A. To limit potential or perceived conflicts the data collected does not pertain directly to any working relationships of the researcher and other participants. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate in this study.

### Is study participation voluntary?

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

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

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

### Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?
The researcher conducting this study is Melonie Kilby. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at mkilby1@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher’s faculty sponsor, Dr. Godson Mensah, at gkmensah@liberty.edu.

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

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

**Your Consent**

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

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

☐ If participating in the interview, the researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

______________________________
Printed Subject Name

______________________________
Signature & Date
Appendix C: Questionnaire Participant Consent

Title of the Project: Non-Executive Engagement in Strategic Projects

Principal Investigator: Melonie Kilby, DBA Student, Liberty University

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**How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data are shared.

- Participant information will be anonymous.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

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

Participants in the questionnaire process will be entered into a random drawing for a $25 Amazon gift card. After completing the questionnaire, participants will be asked to click on a separate survey link and enter their email address to be entered into the drawing. One individual will be randomly selected for the gift. This will be completed once all questionnaires are received.

**Does the researcher have any conflicts of interest?**

The researcher serves as a faculty chair at Community College A. To limit potential or perceived conflicts the data collected does not pertain directly to any working relationships of the researcher and other participants. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this
relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate in this study.

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<td>By continuing this online questionnaire, you are agreeing to be in this study.</td>
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Appendix D: Interview Guide

The interview questions located in this interview guide were created to answer the three specific research questions of this study. These questions were developed to encourage participants to provide complete and in-depth information concerning their experiences with strategic projects or lack of experience with strategic projects. The participant’s true feelings and thoughts are asked to be presented throughout the entire interview or questionnaire. This will allow for validity and solid data analysis. The interview questions will be provided in virtual or face-to-face interviews. After data saturation is reached an online questionnaire will be sent to participants for triangulation purposes.

Survey Questions

General Demographic

1. Please select the appropriate range that includes your years of service at Community College A.
   a. 0-9
   b. 10-19
   c. 20 and above

2. Please select the role that you play at Community College A.
   a. Staff
   b. Faculty

3. Please select the division that best matches your employment area at Community College A.
   a. Applied Career Technologies
   b. Arts & Sciences
c. Business and Public Service Technologies

d. Health Sciences

e. Campus/Center (not main campus)

f. Institutional Advancement

g. Instructional Support & Student Services

h. Workforce Development and Community Education

i. Finance & Administration

j. Other

Related to Research Question 1

4. Are you familiar with the strategic plan currently being implemented at Community College A?

   (If yes, proceed to 4a. If no, proceed to 5.)
   a. What do you perceive as the main goal of the current strategic plan?

5. Are you directly involved in any committees that are working on strategic initiatives?

   (If yes, proceed to 5a. If no, proceed to 6.)
   a. Describe the process of how you were selected, volunteered, or were placed onto one of these committees?

   b. Would you choose to participate on this committee again if you know what you do now? And why.

6. To what extent do you feel that you have the knowledge and experience that would aid in implementing the strategic plan at Community College A?

   a. At any point have you felt encouraged or discouraged to participate in decision-making at Community College A? Explain.

   b. How comfortable are you giving your opinion and talking in groups?
7. Estimate (in hours per week) the amount of time that you perceive assisting directly in one of the strategic committees may entail.
   a. Would this time be something that you could include in your workday with your current job duties? Why or why not?

8. Describe the culture of Community College A.
   a. In what ways does the culture of Community College A encourage or discourage you to participate in additional duties on top of your regular job duties?

**Related to Research Question 2**

9. In what ways does your direct supervisor encourage your engagement in the implementation of the strategic plan at Community College A?

10. In what ways does the president of the college encourage your engagement in the implementation of the strategic plan at Community College A?

11. Do the requests for engagement made by your supervisors motivate you to participate? If so, how?

12. Describe ways in which you have been motivated to be engaged in your place of employment in any organization that you have worked.

**Related to Research Question 3**

13. Scenario: You are asked by your direct supervisor to participate on a committee directly related to the strategic planning process at Community College A. Do you accept this position on the committee?
   (If yes, proceed to 13a. If no, proceed to 13b.)
   a. If yes, what motivated you to participate on this committee?
(If answering 13a, 13b is not needed. Proceed to 14.)

b. If no, what would prevent you from participating on this committee?

14. Scenario: You are an individual who is knowledgeable in a particular subject matter that is the main topic of one strategic plan committee. Would you be comfortable speaking with your supervisor, the college administration, or someone on that committee to ask to be included in the discussions?

   a. Why or why not?
Appendix E: Interview Data Visualization

Figure 3

Strategic Plan: Interview Participants

Figure 4

Perceived Main Goal of the Strategic Plan: Interview Participants
Figure 5

*Participation on a Strategic Committee: Interview Participants*

![Pie chart showing participation on a strategic committee. 65% are on a committee, 35% are not.]

Figure 6

*Tenure of Individuals Participating on a Strategic Committee: Interview Participants*

![Pie chart showing tenure of individuals. 38% have 0-9 years of service, 25% have 10-19 years of service.]

Figure 7

*Role of Individuals Participating on a Strategic Committee: Interview Participants*

![Pie chart showing role of individuals. 50% are faculty, 50% are staff. 0% are both.]

Figure 8

*How They Became Part of a Strategic Committee: Interview Participants*

Figure 9

*On a Strategic Committee and Would Participate Again: Interview Participants*

Figure 10

*Knowledge to Assist in the Strategic Plan: Interview Participants*
Figure 11

Encouraged or Discouraged to Make Decisions: Interview Participants

Figure 12

Encouraged/Discouraged to Make Decisions 0-9 Years Tenure: Interview Participants
Figure 13

Encouraged/Discouraged to Make Decisions 10-19 Years Tenure: Interview Participants

Figure 14

Encouraged/Discouraged to Make Decisions 20 or More Years Tenure: Interview Participants
Figure 15

Encouraged/Discouraged to Make Decisions Faculty: Interview Participants

Figure 16

Encouraged/Discouraged to Make Decisions Staff: Interview Participants

Figure 17

Comfort Level Speaking in Groups: Interview Participants
Figure 18

Estimated Hours Per Week to Participate on a Strategic Committee: Interview Participants

- 65% estimated 5 Hrs or Less
- 35% estimated Over 5 Hrs

Figure 19

Could Estimated Time Fit in Current Schedule: Interview Participants

- 55% Yes
- 30% No
- 15% Sometimes
Figure 20

*Culture Word Cloud: Interview Participants*

Figure 21

*Culture of WCC Encourages Participation: Interview Participants*

Figure 22

*Direct Supervisor Engagement Word Cloud: Interview Participants*
Figure 23

WCC President Engagement Word Cloud: Interview Participants

Figure 24

Requests by Supervisors Motivate Participation: Interview Participants

Figure 25

Motivation to Participate When Asked by Direct Supervisor Word Cloud: Interview Participants
Figure 26

*Overall Motivators in Any Organization: Interview Participants*

![Motivators Diagram]

Figure 27

*Would Participate if Asked by Direct Supervisor: Interview Participants*

![Participation Pie Chart]
Figure 28

*Reasons to Participate When Asked by Direct Supervisor Word Cloud: Interview Participants*

| Appreciate | Involvement | Beneficial | Respect | Offer | Important | Asked | Opinion | Willing | Able | Duties | Serve | Approached | Students | Accepted |

Figure 29

*Ask to Participate on Committee if Knowledgeable: Interview Participants*

Would You Ask to Participate if You Are Knowledgeable: Interview Participants

- 17% Would Ask To Participate
- 83% Would Not Ask To Participate
Figure 30

Reasons Participants Would Ask to be on a Committee Word Cloud: Interview Participants

- contribute
- experience
- opinion
- included
- confident
- able
- comfortable
- input
- helped
- knowledge
- voice
- subject
- idea
- benefit
- community
Appendix F: Questionnaire Data Visualization

Figure 31

Familiar with the Strategic Plan: Questionnaire Participants

Figure 32

Perceived Main Goal of the Strategic Plan: Questionnaire Participants
Figure 33

Encouraged or Discouraged to Make Decisions: Questionnaire Participants

Figure 34

Encouraged/Discouraged to Make Decisions 0-9 Years Tenure: Questionnaire Participants
Figure 35

Encouraged/Discouraged to Make Decisions 10-19 Years Tenure: Questionnaire Participants

![Pie chart showing the distribution of responses for 10-19 years tenure.

- Encouraged: 15%
- Discouraged: 15%
- Neutral: 54%
- Not Discouraged, but Not Encouraged: 8%
- Both at Times: 0%]

Figure 36

Encouraged/Discouraged to Make Decisions 20 or More Years Tenure: Questionnaire Participants

![Pie chart showing the distribution of responses for 20 or more years tenure.

- Encouraged: 33%
- Discouraged: 0%
- Neutral: 34%
- Not Discouraged, but Not Encouraged: 0%
- Both at Times: 33%]
Figure 37

Encouraged/Discouraged to Make Decisions Faculty: Questionnaire Participants

Figure 38

Encouraged/Discouraged to Make Decisions Staff: Questionnaire Participants
Figure 39

Comfort Level Speaking in Groups: Questionnaire Participants

Figure 40

Estimated Hours Per Week to Participate on a Strategic Committee: Questionnaire Participants
Figure 41

*Could Estimated Time Fit in Current Schedule: Questionnaire Participants*

Figure 42

*Culture Word Cloud: Questionnaire Participants*

Figure 43

*Culture of WCC Encourages Participation: Questionnaire Participants*
Figure 44

Direct Supervisor Engagement Word Cloud: Questionnaire Participants

Figure 45

WCC President Engagement Word Cloud: Questionnaire Participants
Figure 46

Requests by Supervisors Motivate Participation: Questionnaire Participants

![Pie chart showing percentages of yes (31%), no (19%), and no response (50%)]

Figure 47

Motivation to Participate When Asked by Direct Supervisor Word Cloud: Questionnaire Participants

![Word cloud with words like requested, encouraged, engagement, involved, valued, ability, discussions]
Figure 48

*Overall Motivators in Any Organization Word Cloud: Questionnaire Participants*

![Word Cloud](image)

Figure 49

*Would Participate if Asked by Direct Supervisor: Questionnaire Participants*

![Pie Chart](image)
Figure 50

Reasons to Participate When Asked by Direct Supervisor Word Cloud: Questionnaire

Participants

declare confidence belief
valued involved opinion
important mission
community ability
institutions growth
care opportunities constraints

Figure 51

Reasons Not to Participate When Asked by Direct Supervisor Word Cloud: Questionnaire

Participants

participant estimate comfortable
constraints
open commit hrs deter
Figure 52

Ask to Participate on Committee if Knowledgeable: Questionnaire Participants

Would You Ask to Participate if You Are Knowledgeable: Questionnaire Participants

- Would Ask To Participate: 13%
- Would Possibly Ask To Participate: 22%
- Would Not Ask To Participate: 55%
- No Response: 10%

Figure 53

Reasons Participants Would Ask to be on a Committee Word Cloud: Questionnaire Participants

- background
- process
- benefit
- subject
- thoughts
- comfortable
- valuable
- ability
- knowledgeable
- add
- expertise
- ideas
- include
- voice
- open
- opportunities

Figure 54

Reasons Participants Would Not Ask to be on a Committee Word Cloud: Questionnaire Participants

- demeaning
- invitation
- expertise
- include
- established
- input
- confident
- conversation