

INFLUENCE OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT SURVEY RESULTS
ON BUSINESS LEADERS' DECISIONS

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents who gave me opportunities they never had, my husband and son who supported me throughout this journey, and the Lord for his wisdom and strength for the journey of life.

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Abstract

Measuring employee engagement has steadily become more commonplace in the last two decades. This study investigated individual experiences of business leaders to better understand how these leaders use employee engagement survey results to make decisions about their organization. The outcomes show that business leaders used employee engagement survey results to make two types of decisions: tactical decisions that lead to quick wins, and strategic decisions that seek long-term organizational success. Additionally, the findings showed that there was a tension that exists between a leader's desire to act on employee engagement survey results and their need to balance organizational profit. Leaders also felt limited in their ability to influence change due to their position or title within the organization. Leaders may want to consider the perception employees hold toward the confidentiality and anonymity of the surveys and how this impacts employee engagement survey results when assessing decisions. Finally, this study's results explored the impact that organizational culture has on engagement and how this impacts leadership decisions. The implications for practice include encouraging human resources professionals and business leaders to create an organizational culture that harnesses the power of the employee voice to make decisions.

Key words: human resources, leadership decisions, employee engagement, organizational culture

Table of Contents

DEDICATION	2
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	3
ABSTRACT	4
CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION	8
Significance of the Research Problem	9
Survey Benefits	12
Deficiencies in the Evidence.....	13
Theoretical Framework	13
Rationale for the Study	14
Theory Discussion	15
Support and Deficiencies in the Model.....	16
Theory Alignment and Misalignment.....	16
Conclusion	17
CHAPTER 2—LITERATURE REVIEW	18
Part I. Overview of Organizational Citizenship Behavior	19
Discretionary Effort	22
Summary	23
Part II. Employee Engagement Topic Overview	24
Employee Disengagement	28
Antecedents to Worker Engagement	31
The Role of the Engagement Survey	33
Summary	34
Part III. Literature Analysis and Discussion	36
Conclusion	39
CHAPTER 3—QUANTITATIVE STUDY	40
Qualitative Research Approach	41

Study Design	43
Participants.....	44
Data Collection	44
Data Analysis	46
Ethical Considerations	47
Trustworthiness.....	47
Potential Researcher Bias	48
CHAPTER 4—FINDINGS.....	51
Participants.....	51
Connie	53
Tom	53
Hanna	54
Buddy	54
Urmgard	54
Cassie	54
Ren	55
Codes, Themes, and Data Analysis.....	55
Themes	56
Analysis of Research Questions.....	84
Summary	85
CHAPTER 5—DISCUSSION.....	88
Overview of Findings	89
Finding 1. Leadership Decisions Based on Employee Engagement Survey Results	
Fell Into Two Categories—Tactical Decisions and Strategic Decisions.....	89
Finding 2. There Appears to Be a Tension Between a Leader’s Desire to Act on the	
Survey Results and Their Responsibility to Grow the Bottom Line	92

Finding 3. There Seems to Be a Gap Between a Leader’s Desire to Act on the Survey Results and Their Ability to Influence Change Due to Their Role, Title, or Globalization	95
Finding 4. It Is Likely That Employee Concerns Surrounding Survey Anonymity and Confidentiality Impact Survey Results and Subsequent Leadership Decisions.....	98
Finding 5. It Appears That Organizational Culture Impacts Employee Engagement Survey Results and Leadership Decisions	100
Implications.....	103
Reflections as Scholar-Practitioner	105
Study Limitations and Future Research	108
Chapter Summary	110
REFERENCES	111
APPENDIX.....	119

CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement has emerged as a widespread topic among researchers in the last decade (Clifton, 2011; Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Kelleher, 2014; Rice, Marlow, & Masarech, 2012; Saks, 2006; Shuck & Wollard, 2010; Wollard, 2011). The outcomes and implications of research studies have slowly evolved from scholarly conversations to practitioner conversations (Clifton, 2011; Kelleher, 2014; Shuck & Herd, 2012; Wollard, 2011) and researcher recommendations are being implemented into organizational practice as more organizations deploy surveys that measure employee engagement (Clifton, 2011; Kelleher, 2014; Rice et al., 2012; Walker, 2012). Business leaders and human resources (HR) professionals have begun to notice the impact that employee engagement can have on productivity and organizational profit (Clifton, 2011; Harter et al., 2002; Shuck & Herd, 2012; Shuck & Wollard, 2010; Walker, 2012; Wollard, 2011).

Though business leaders may be more likely to measure the engagement level of employees (Kelleher, 2014; Rice et al., 2012; Walker, 2012), they may be less focused on the impact employee disengagement has on employee productivity (Harter et al., 2002; Saks, 2006; Wollard, 2011) and how disengagement may impact the profitability of the organization (Harter et al., 2002; Kelleher, 2014; Wollard, 2011). Therefore, business leaders who would like to retain talent, reduce turnover, increase productivity, and keep their workforce motivated (Corace, 2007; Harter et al., 2002; Kelleher, 2014; Rice et al., 2012; Saks, 2006; Shuck & Wollard, 2010) may benefit from understanding the merits of using employee engagement survey results (Corace, 2007; Gable, Chyung, Marker, & Winiecki, 2010; Heger, 2007; Kelleher, 2014; Pugh & Dietz, 2008; Rice et al., 2012) to make decisions about their organization. Keeping in mind that employee engagement is

more routinely measured within organizations, this study endeavored to explore how business leaders use employee engagement survey results to make decisions about their organization (Purcell, 2014; Sugheir, Coco, & Kaupins, 2011).

Significance of the Research Problem

Nearly two-thirds of employees are disengaged from their work (Carnegie & Associates, 2014; Gallup, 2013; Harter et al., 2002). Disengagement costs businesses in the United States approximately \$450 to \$550 billion annually (Gallup, 2013). Employees, not business leaders, hold much of the power of organizational profit through their daily engagement levels in their work (Carnegie & Associates, 2014; Gallup, 2013; Harter et al., 2002; Heger, 2007). In a profit-driven and competitive market place where business leaders are reducing headcount and asking employees to do more with less, employee engagement or disengagement (Heger 2007; Masson, Royal, Agnew, & Fine, 2008) could be the link between the intangible, yet critical asset of human capital and organizational profit (Harter et al., 2002) to impact business outcomes (Gable et al., 2010). Human capital is the value that is placed on an employee's ability (assets) or perceived ability to produce profit for an organization (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, & Wright, 2010). Business leaders, therefore, may be positioned to make the greatest profits when they leverage employee engagement survey results to make decisions about their organization.

Disengagement tends to increase turnover, theft, absenteeism, and safety incidents, whereas engagement tends to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty, product quality, productivity, and profitability (Harter et al., 2002). Engaged employees are top performers who take personal responsibility in helping their organizations succeed (Gable et al., 2010). Engagement can be defined as when an employee's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are directed toward a desired organizational goal (Shuck & Wollard, 2010). Engagement can

foster greater feelings of personal fulfillment and well-being at work (Kahn, 1990).

In his seminal study on engagement in two organizations, Kahn (1990) explained that the psychological state of individuals impacts how engaged an individual is in work. Kahn believes there are three psychological states that influence individuals and impacts that person's work engagement—meaningfulness, safety, and availability. In this study, *meaningfulness* is described as the return on investment that an employee receives physically, emotionally, or cognitively by participating in a role or activity (Kahn, 1990). Meaningfulness would include an employee's feeling of value, worth, and significance; their ability to be autonomous or creative; and their knowledge of how participating in the role or task would affect an individual's career options or personal life. *Safety* is defined as how free an individual feels in a role or activity to show their full self without fear of negative consequence to self-image, status, or career (Kahn, 1990). Finally, *availability* is simply defined as how ready an individual is physically, emotionally, or cognitively to take on a role or task based on what is occurring in that person's professional or personal lives at the time (Kahn, 1990). Employees' psychological engagement or disengagement can impact an individual's relationship to work.

As mentioned, nearly two-thirds of employees are disengaged from their work (Carnegie & Associates, 2014; Gallup, 2013; Harter et al., 2002). The landscape for employees has changed rapidly in the last two decades as employees have been forced to weather significant organizational restructuring, increased competition, and rapid changes in technology (Heger, 2007). These changes can produce employee fatigue (Ace & Parker, 2010), cause a decrease in employee value proposition toward their organization (Heger, 2007), and reduce loyalty, trust, and commitment of employees (Tsui & Wu, 2005, as cited in Heger, 2007), all of which can lead

to employee disengagement. Business leaders, who themselves may be struggling to keep up with the rapidly changing organizational landscape, may be unaware of the impact that employee disengagement can have on employee productivity and organizational profitability (Harter et al., 2002; Heger, 2007; Wollard, 2011). Surveys are considered an important vehicle that business leaders can use to help them measure employee engagement (Gable et al., 2010; Kelleher, 2014; Rice et al., 2012; Walker, 2012). Business leaders who deploy annual employee engagement surveys should consider the benefits of using these survey results as a basis for making changes within the organization that could lead to increases in employee engagement (Gabel et al., 2010; Kelleher, 2014; Rice et al., 2012; Walker, 2012), the perceived value proposition held by the employee toward their organization (Heger, 2007), and the psychological state of employees in relation to their work (Kahn, 1990). When considering the impact that employee engagement or disengagement can have on profit, business leaders, who are primarily concerned with the bottom line, may want to consider employee engagement survey results when making decisions about their organization.

Organizations show profit from three types of assets—financial, physical, and intangible (Noe et al., 2010). *Financial assets* are derived from cash or tradable securities. *Physical assets* are comprised of property or equipment. *Intangible assets* consist of customer capital, which is the perceived value a customer's places on the relationship. When discussing assets, it is also important to consider social, human, and intellectual capital. Social capital is the collaborative relationship that should occur among colleagues. Human capital is the value employers place on employee's skills, knowledge, and talents. Intellectual capital is the discrepancy between physical assets and the market value (Noe et al., 2010). In recent years, emphasis has been placed on the critical role that intangible assets play in the success of an organization's bottom line

(Zimmerman, 2003, as cited in Noe et al., 2010). According to HR professionals, human capital and social capital are considered among the most critical of the intangible assets (Noe et al., 2010). This is good news for employees, and it should be dually noted by businesses leaders who deploy employee engagement surveys and consider the impact that acting on employee engagement survey results may have on their intangible assets, including their human capital that impacts organization profit.

Several studies in the last two decades have focused on the importance of employee engagement and disengagement within organizations (Harter et al., 2002; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006; Shuck, Reio, & Rocco, 2011). Acting on the survey results can provide leaders with an opportunity to improve employee productivity through increased employee engagement (Rice et al., 2012; Walker, 2012). Not acting on the results may decrease engagement (Walker, 2012). Educating leaders on the merits of increasing engagement by acting on survey results (Gabel et al., 2010; Walker, 2012), and understanding the challenges of not acting on the results, may positively affect organizational profit (Zimmerman, 2003, as cited in Noe et al., 2010).

Survey Benefits

Surveys can provide multiple benefits for the employer and the employee (Gable et al., 2010). First, survey results tell a story about the employees that otherwise might not be heard. Second, survey results can give employees a voice. Third, survey results can empower employees by providing them a “seat at the table” with business leaders and the opportunity to influence decisions made within the organization. Conversely, surveys can also provide multiple wins for business leaders. Surveys give business leaders a better understanding of their employees’ needs and challenges, as well as critical insight into what is disrupting their engagement at work (Gable et al., 2010). Finally, surveys give business leaders the opportunity

to make changes that will positively impact their employee's productivity (Rice et al., 2012; Walker, 2012) and organizational profitability (Harter et al., 2002). Surveys and survey results can be powerful tools when properly used by business leaders.

Deficiencies in the Evidence

Since Kahn's (1990) qualitative study, much of the research conducted in the last two decades has been on employees and their engagement levels. In more recent years, researchers have focused on the benefits that survey results can have on an organization and how the actions and strategies that leaders employ based on these results can inspire a workforce (Kelleher, 2014; Purcell, 2014; Rice et al., 2012; Sugheir et al., 2011; Walker, 2012). The intent of this study was to better understand the impact survey results had on business leader decisions. Under consideration is how business leaders used survey results to understand engagement levels of employees, and then how the leaders used the survey results to make decisions. The central research question for this study is: *How do business leaders use employee engagement survey results to make decisions?*

Theoretical Framework

The normative decision model (Vroom & Yetton, 1973) was chosen as the theoretical framework for the current study because it allowed the researcher to understand how leaders make decisions. This model aids in answering the central thesis question being examined: *How do business leaders use employee engagement survey results to make decisions?* Specifically, this model views employee engagement survey results as the voice of the employee. It is important to note that the normative decision model (Vroom & Yetton, 1973) was created to help pinpoint how leadership decisions are made and if leadership decisions will be effective (Yukl, 2013). The normative decision model (Vroom & Yetton, 1973) falls under the umbrella of a

contingency theory. Contingency theories “describe how aspects of the leadership situation alter a leader’s influence on an individual subordinate or a work group” (Yukl, 2011, p. 286). In most situations within the normative decision model, the independent variable, that which cannot be controlled for, is the *decision* made by the leader (Yukl, 2011). Leadership decisions are therefore the “wild card” in the decision-making equation when considering how leaders use the engagement survey results to make decisions.

Rationale for the Study

Within the context of this study, the survey acted as a conduit through which employees could be heard, and the normative decision model provided a framework to understand how business leaders “hear” their employees and then made decisions about their organization through the survey results (see Table 1.1). First, the normative decision model allowed the researcher to understand if the business leader sees the survey as an important opportunity for employees to lend their voice by identifying problem areas within the organization. Second, the normative decision model allowed the researcher to understand how the business leader uses the survey results to make decisions. Third, based on the discussions in the in-depth interviews, the normative decision model helped the researcher to determine if business leaders leveraged subordinates based on the survey results once a decision was made, such as through focus groups or peer-led activities to increase understanding to make organizational decisions (Vroom & Yetton, 1973; Yukl, 2013).

Table 1.1 outlines the varieties of decisions included in the normative decision model (Vroom & Yetton, 1973). This model seeks to understand the decision making process of leaders by using the survey results as the voice of the employees (Hughes et al., 2009; Walker, 2012).

Table 1.1

Normative Decision Model

Decision Variety	Decision Procedures
Autocratic I (AI)	Leader solves the problem or make the decision yourself, using information available to him/her at the time.
Autocratic II (AII)	Leader gathers information from subordinates, but solves problem or makes decision independently.
Consulting I (CI)	Leader shares the problem with the relevant subordinates individually, getting their ideas and suggestions, without bringing them together as a group. Then makes the decision, which may or may not reflect the subordinates' influence.
Consulting II (CII)	Leader shares the problem with subordinates as a group, obtaining their collective ideas and suggestions. Then makes the decision, which may or may not reflect subordinates' influence.
Group II (GII)	Leader shares the problem with subordinates as a group. Together subordinates generate and evaluate alternatives and attempt to reach agreement (consensus) on a solution. Leader's role is much like that of chairperson who does not try to influence the group, and is willing to accept and implement any solution that has the support of the entire group.

Note. Based on Vroom and Yetton;s (1973) normative decision model; adapted from Yukl (2013, p. 111).

Theory Discussion

The normative decision model is focused on determining how much say subordinates have in the decision-making process (Hughes et al., 2009), in this case through employee engagement survey results being used as the “voice” of the employee. The model makes no effort to focus on the impact that the leader’s motivations, personality, attitudes, or values have on the decisions-making process (Hughes et al., 2009). The normative decision model appears to help increase leader effectiveness (Hughes et al., 2009). This is done by creating criteria to estimate the “adequacy of the decisions made” (Hughes et al., 2009, p. 579). The criteria created include both the *quality* of the decision and the *acceptance* of the decision by subordinates. The quality of the decision includes a “better or worse” designation that would impact the organization or the group. The acceptance refers to whether the subordinates accepted the decision that was made, which is important particularly when considering a change initiative,

which would require the subordinates to “buy in” to make the change successful. Because the researcher was focusing on how the voice of the employee influenced the leaders’ decisions through the employee engagement survey results, the acceptance of the leaders’ decisions by the subordinates was not under consideration.

Support and Deficiencies in the Model

The normative decision model provided the researcher a means to investigate individual experiences of business leaders and understand how these leaders use the survey results as the voice of the employee to make decisions about their organization. This model was helpful in that it focuses on leadership decisions (Yukl, 2013). It is important to note that though leaders tended to make more *effective* decisions when using this model (Vroom & Jago, 1988, as cited in Hughes et al., 2009), there is no clear evidence that leaders using this model are more effective leaders *overall* (Miner, 1975, as cited in Hughes et al., 2009); therefore, further study is needed to consider this aspect of leadership effectiveness. This model was later enhanced by Vroom and Jago (1988) to consider other aspects of the decision making process (Yukl, 2011, 2013).

Theory Alignment and Misalignment

Alignment. Vroom and Yetton (1973) speculate that when employees have a say in what decisions are made, group performance is more likely to increase. An employee engagement survey is a vehicle that gives employees a “voice” and a “seat at the table” in the decision-making process, *if and only if* business leaders are listening by analyzing the results and actively participating in the employee engagement initiative and making decisions based on the results (Rice et al., 2012; Walker, 2012). Yukl (2011) states, “Discussing options (with subordinates) and having a voice in selecting one of them will increase understanding of the problem, increase feelings of procedural justice, and provide a sense of ownership for the decision” (p. 291). When

leaders do not acknowledge or act on the results, there is a greater chance that employees may feel they do not have a voice and they do not share in the decision-making process, which may decrease employee engagement (Rice et al., 2012; Walker, 2012).

The normative decision model (Vroom & Yetton, 1973) aligns with the purpose and central question of this study, which seeks to discover how business leaders use employee engagement survey results to make decisions about their organization. Hughes et al. (2009) wrote: “To determine which situational and follower factors affect the level of participation and group performance, Vroom and Yetton (1973) first investigated the decision-making processes leaders use in group settings” (p. 579). In the context of the thesis research, the “group setting” is the collective voice of the employees who took the employee engagement survey.

Misalignment. According to Rice et al. (2012) and Walker (2012), lack of decision-making by the leader based on the survey results can negatively impact employee engagement. The normative decision model does not allow for times when a leader decides not to make a decision based on the results. To address and understand this phenomenon, the research sought to identify during the leader interview situations when a leader may have chosen not to act on the employee engagement survey results. This is discussed in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

Conclusion

Since the decisions leaders make are considered the wild card in a business setting, using the normative decision model (Vroom & Yetton, 1973) helped the researcher better understand how leaders make decisions using employee engagement survey results as the voice of employees. By viewing the problem of practice through the normative decision model, the researcher was able to address the central thesis question, which was to discover how business leaders use employee engagement survey results to make decisions.

CHAPTER 2—LITERATURE REVIEW

There is power in understanding and harnessing employee engagement in the workplace (Saks & Gruman, 2011). Engaged workers are more likely to be productive and satisfied in their work than disengaged workers (Collins, 2010; Harter et al., 2002; Wollard, 2011). Business leaders who understand the significance of increasing employee engagement within their organizations have the potential to position their employees and their organizations for greater success (Clifton, 2011; Gable et al., 2010; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Walker, 2012). Conversely, business leaders who fail to recognize the importance of engaging workers stand a greater chance of perpetuating disengagement among workers (Walker, 2012; Wollard, 2011).

As organizations strive to stay competitive and balance their budgets in a shifting landscape, business leaders are often forced to look more closely at their human capital and consider the economic value that employees bring to the workplace (Noe et al., 2010). Considering this business challenge, the purpose of this qualitative research study is to discover how business leaders use employee engagement survey results as a means to understand their employees and make decisions about their organization. The central research question for this study was: *How do business leaders use employee engagement survey results to make decisions?* The following literature review addresses this question by considering the role that employee engagement survey results plays in business leader decisions.

The discussion of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), definitions of OCB, and motivation techniques for effective engagement as it relates to OCB were also explored. Part II of this chapter offers a synopsis of how each of the elements of OCB intersect with one another. The goal was to provide a better understanding how employees can be more engaged in the workplace, and how OCB can lead to employee engagement and better overall foundational

principles for educating leaders about the benefits of increased employee engagement. Finally, a discussion is included on the benefits of making knowledgeable decisions regarding employees and the organization's practices in relation to employee engagement survey results.

Part I. Overview of Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Observing employee behavior through the theoretical lens of OCB can provide insight into what influences employees' decisions related to their work and work roles. Smith, Organ, and Near (1983) coined the term *organizational citizenship behavior* and defined it as "acts of cooperation, helpfulness, suggestions, gestures of good will, altruism, and other instances of what we might call citizenship behavior" (p. 653). The motive for choosing this topic is to identify possible connections between OCBs and employee discretionary effort as a precursor to employee engagement. This portion of the literature review discusses 15 articles that span over the course of 24 years. Some key terms to consider while reading this section on OCB include: *extra-role*, *in-role*, *discretionary effort*, *proactive behavior*, and *self-efficacy*. These terms help connect the topic of OCB to employee engagement as they speak to the relationship that employees have to their work. How employees behave and why they behave in a certain manner is the backdrop for understanding employee engagement and disengagement. If organizational leaders are able to understand the importance of OCB and how increased discretionary effort can positively impact organizational outcomes, they may have a better understanding of how to engage employees in their work and why attending to employee engagement survey results is beneficial when making organizational decisions.

OCB appears to be an important element that leads toward organizational success (Smith et al., 1983). Though proper citizenship behavior may be the glue that holds an organization together, particularly during times of duress, there is no formal role requirement (Smith et al.,

1983). Interestingly, OCB is a conscious decision that an employee makes to cooperate. OCBs appear to produce an internal balance that exists among employees, employer, and even clients who have agreed to work together—though no formal or verbal exchange or agreement is made among the individuals to do so (Smith et al., 1983). Arguably, such things as altruism, goodwill, or helpfulness are difficult to measure, not easily enforced, but are noticed when either present or missing within a team, business unit, or an organization (Smith et al., 1983). It is this type of altruistic behavior that makes an employee a good citizen. OCB appears to be an important element that leads to organizational success (Smith et al., 1983). The challenge then for business leaders is to understand what influences an employee to engage in “good citizen” behaviors.

Smith et al.’s (1983) seminal research on organizational citizenship behavior led to the work of Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, and Fetter (1990) who expanded the discussion to include the impact of transformational leadership on OCB. Yukl (1989) defined transformational leadership as “the process of influencing major changes in the attitudes and assumptions of organization members and building commitment for the organization’s mission, objectives, and strategies” (p. 269). The work of Katz and Kahn (1978) revealed that transformational leaders positively influenced follower behavior by spurring them to exceed their role expectations and overall performance (as cited in Podsakoff et al., 1990). Based on this work, it appears that transformational leaders may foster an increase in OCB among employees because of their leadership style, which tends to draw the best out of employees. Podsakoff et al. (1990) determined that, based on the foundational work of Smith et al. (1983), transformational leaders have an *indirect* effect on OCB when followers experience sufficient *trust* in the leader, but OCB is not influenced simply by satisfaction in the transformational leader. In this case, leadership trust trumps leadership satisfaction. Therefore, employees seem more likely to engage in OCBs

when they have greater levels of trust in leadership.

Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail (1994) discussed the dual role that organizational imaging and social identity play in OCB. They state, “Organizational identification is the degree to which a member defines him or herself” in relation to an organization (p. 230). Based on their research they explain: “Strong organizational identification may translate into desirable outcomes such as intra-organizational cooperation and citizenship behaviors” (p. 240). Well-being and behavior is based not only on what employees believe about themselves, but it is also based on what they believe others think about them *based on their organizational affiliation*. This external and internal imaging proves powerful because it influences employee behavior and the extent to which an employee engages in OCB. An interesting twist on this notion of imaging occurs in the work of Bolino (1999). Bolino contends that not all OCB is motivated by acts that enhance the organization. Rather, some acts that appear to be OCB may actually be management-impressing and self-serving to enhance either the employee’s image or standing within the organization. Bolino contends that if employees believe their image needs to be enhanced, their OCB may actually be more management-impressing and self-serving than focused on organizational citizenship. Therefore, an employee’s motive should be considered, at least to some extent, when identifying what appears to be OCB. Arguably, leaders should consider this same motive when considering employee engagement survey results. Interestingly, according to Morrison (1994), employees may be better at identifying OCBs than their supervisors. For example, Morrison’s (1994) research concluded that employees who take part in extra-role behaviors may be considered to exhibit OCBs, but when self-reporting, employees see their actions as in-role behaviors. Morrison (1994) believes future research would help define what employees view as in-role versus extra-role (job breadth) behaviors that lead to OCB.

Discretionary Effort

Based on the literature on OCB, the term discretionary effort (a precursor to employee engagement) first came into play when Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, and Bachrach, (1997) referenced Organ's (1988) book that defined OCB as displaying deeds that were discretionary in nature and not part of a formal job description, such as covering for a coworker who is out or being part of a project team for a new product offering. Van Dyne and LePine (1998) also referred to OCB extra-role behaviors as discretionary and not associated with job responsibilities or punishable when not performed. Sparrow, Liden, Wayne, and Kraimer (2001) considered extra-role and discretionary behavior from the perspective of social networks. They determined that individual job performance was enhanced and employees were more likely to expend discretionary effort beyond their job description when they were more central to their group's advice networks (i.e., social networks that had common interests and knowledge levels). Those employees who were more central to advice networks were viewed by others to be high performers and, therefore, could appear to have great OCB.

Another term for both extra-role behavior and discretionary effort is *proactive behavior*. Parker, Williams, and Turner (2006) identified the following antecedents to proactive work behavior as an employee's perceived self-efficacy to perform a role successfully, as a measure of role flexibility and autonomy, and they further suggested that if an organization wants employees who are proactive in their behavior, they should foster self-efficacy and encourage flexible role orientations. This idea was earlier studied by Deci (1971, as cited in Gagné & Deci, 2005), who considered the role that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation played in producing proactive behavior. In more recent work, Pink (2009) expanded on the work of Deci by unearthing three elements that he believes motivates employees—having autonomy in their work, mastering their

work, and having purpose in their work. The research of Deci and others, including Maslow (1943, 1954) and Pink (2009), determined that motivation is not purely external, but much of it is internally driven. Overall, employees who are motivated are motivated for specific reasons, and these reasons drive employees to engage in their work and go beyond the role description. Understanding the antecedents of motivation may help employers increase employee satisfaction and productivity at the same time. It is interesting how these concepts of imaging, in-role, extra-role, intrinsic motivation, and discretionary effort were built on the original OCB research first presented by Smith et al. (1983).

Summary

The original objective of this portion of the literature review was to explore the possible intersection between employee engagement and discretionary effort and how this information could benefit leaders as they consider employee engagement survey results and organizational decisions. It was soon apparent when reaching this topic that making a direct connection between employee engagement and discretionary effort in the literature was more like climbing a jungle gym than climbing a ladder. There were no consistent consecutive rungs that led directly from employee engagement to discretionary effort, but rather a web that took the researcher first through the OCB literature that then led to the literature on discretionary effort. For example, it became clear that to understand discretionary effort, OCB must first be explored because it was Organ (1988) that first made an inference to the role that discretionary effort played in an employee's engagement in their work as it relates to the organization (as cited in Podsakoff et al., 1997). He did so by defining OCBs as "behavior(s) of a discretionary nature that are not part of the employee's formal role requirements, but nevertheless promote the effective functioning of the organization" (p. 4). Discretionary effort appears to be a close kin to extra-role behavior

(Morrison, 1994; Podsakoff et al., 1990; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998) and occurs when job functions performed by an employee are not part of an employee's formal responsibilities, but are done solely at the discretion of the employee. Exploring OCB literature provided a greater understanding of how discretionary effort occurs and how it might possibly intersect with an employee's engagement in their work. It also proved helpful for leaders to be aware of how OCB and discretionary effort may have factored into the employee engagement survey results when making decisions.

Part II. Employee Engagement Topic Overview

The literature review on employee engagement seeks to expand the understanding of employee behavior as it relates to work engagement. This information can help lay the foundation for the importance of educating leaders about the benefits of increased employee engagement and the benefits of making knowledgeable decisions regarding employees and the organization based on employee engagement survey results. This portion of the literature review discusses some 15 articles that span over the course of two decades. Some key terms to consider while reading this section on employee engagement include: *employee engagement*, *disengagement*, *psychological commitment*, and *work roles*. As suggested in Part I of this literature review, if organizational leaders are able to understand the importance of OCB they may then have a better understanding of how to relate to and care for their employees as they make decisions about their organizations. The same is true of understanding employee engagement as discussed in this section of the literature review.

Kahn (1990) conducted the first study on the psychology of engagement among workers. This first ethnographic qualitative study consisted of two opposite, yet dynamic work settings: a summer camp in India and an architectural firm in the Northeast region of the U.S. The goal of

Kahn's study was to consider how psychologically present employees were in their roles, and how this psychological engagement or disengagement impacted their ability to perform their work. Kahn (1990) defined personal engagement "as the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles" (p. 694). Conversely, he defined disengagement "as the uncoupling of selves from work roles" (p. 694). According to Kahn's findings, how psychologically invested employees are in work can impact the level and quality of the work.

Following Kahn's initial study of employee engagement, several important studies followed, one of which Harter et al. (2002) conducted. In this study, employee engagement was defined as "the individual's involvement and satisfaction with, as well as enthusiasm for, work" (p. 4). Significant results were generated using a 12-question survey called the Gallup Workplace Audit (GWA). The 12 items were considered to be antecedents to employee engagement. This survey was distributed to 36 companies with nearly 8,000 business units and proved significant in that it allowed a number of variables to be analyzed. The variables included customer satisfaction, productivity, profit, employee turnover, and accidents. The findings suggested that engagement took place when employees were connected emotionally to others, were challenged in their work, had clearly defined work roles, had the proper tools to conduct their work, felt fulfilled in their work, were part of a trusting team, had the opportunity to grow, and had managers/supervisors who were supportive.

The GWA was designed with two purposes: the first was to measure attitudinal outcomes of employees in the areas of satisfaction, loyalty, pride, customer service, and intent to stay; and the second was to measure the influence (or antecedents) that managers had on the aforementioned attitudinal outcomes. According to the results, Harter et al. (2002) explained that employees tend to be engaged in a work role "in part because their basic needs are met fairly

consistently” (p. 5). Based on the findings of the GWA, managers, HR professionals, and business leaders may benefit their organizations by considering employee attitudinal outcomes and needs in order to increase customer satisfaction and the organization’s bottom line.

Saks (2006) further propelled the concept of employee engagement by surveying 102 employees in multiple organizations. This study proved to be significant in that it addressed whether job engagement (i.e., the level in which an individual is invested in a role) was different than employee engagement. Saks also addressed the relevance of organizational support in relation to job engagement. The findings showed that there is an important difference between organization and job engagement. It was discovered that procedural justice is a predictor of organizational engagement and job characteristics are a predictor of job engagement. Additional findings included how both organizational and job engagement influenced “job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intentions to quit, and organizational citizenship behavior (rather than deviant behavior)” (Saks, 2006, p. 600). The implication to HR professionals and leaders is that perceived employee support for the organization predicts the level of both job and organizational engagement, both of which are critical to satisfactory job performance and organizational success.

Saks’ (2006) study was followed by the important work of Macey and Schneider (2008), which focused on the *meaning* of employee engagement. Macey and Schneider felt the study of employee engagement was still relatively new, and as a result, the meaning of employee engagement was still somewhat vague within the scholarly and practitioner worlds, particularly in the area of a clear definition. Macey and Schneider (2008) defined engagement as “a model that simultaneously embraces the psychological state and the behavior it implies” (p. 5). They saw engagement defined from two perspectives within the literature—attitude and behavior. It is

critical, in their opinion, that researchers make it clear from which perspective they are approaching engagement. By linking employee engagement to three major areas—trait, psychological state, and behavior—they found that trait engagement (i.e., an employee’s view of work) influences their psychological state (i.e., the thoughts and feelings one has about work), which in turn influences an employee’s behavior in the workplace. Macey and Schneider contended that trait, psychological state, and behavior can be used to further explain employee engagement. In regard to HR professionals and leaders, both trust and a transformational leadership style (which in part seeks to enhance the sense of self in an employee) were important components to these three areas and their influence on employee engagement in order to get desired work results.

The work of Shuck and Wollard (2010) also focused on the topic of employee engagement and was directed toward HR professionals. They began their research by providing an extensive overview of historical literature beginning with Kahn (1990) on how the theory of employee engagement has evolved to the present day. First, Shuck and Wollard’s (2010) literature review summarized the engagement research that had taken place up to that point with the goal of laying a firm foundation upon which future scholars and practitioners (HR professionals in particular) could conduct future work. Secondly, their in-depth literature review provided a much-needed unification of language and a definition of employee engagement that, prior to this point, had not existed. Shuck and Wollard (2010) defined employee engagement as “an individual employee’s cognitive, emotional, and behavioral state directed toward desired organizational outcomes” (p. 103). Third, they identified a strong correlation in the literature between employee engagement and the concepts of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors of employees directed toward an individual’s work. The research of Shuck and Wollard (2010) is

important to the development of the theory of employee engagement. This work provided a thorough historical background, clarifying language including a collective definition that can be used by both scholars and practitioners, and it made a valuable correlation within the literature between engagement thought processes, emotions, and behaviors. Researchers and practitioners should consider these revelations to better understand the antecedents to employee engagement.

Employee Disengagement

Though employers may say that employees should not take business decisions personally, employee disengagement quickly becomes a personal matter for a business leader when it is linked to employee productivity and organizational profit. Employee disengagement has financial implications for employers (Harter et al., 2002; Shuck et al., 2011). It is reported that more than 50% of workers feel a sense of disengagement from their work (Harter et al., 2002; Wollard, 2011). This is a percentage that should keep leaders up at night. To further add to potential sleepless nights of leaders, recent estimates place the disengagement costs to employers in the U.S. at approximately \$450 to \$500 billion a year (Gallup, 2013). Lower levels of profitability and productivity among workers were reported at organizations that had lower levels of employee engagement, whereas organizations with higher levels of employee engagement have reported “40% higher revenue than those with low levels” (Herman, Olivo, & Gioia, 2003, as cited in Wollard, 2011, p. 527) of engagement. Engagement concerns for leaders are amplified in tough economic conditions. During these times, organizations are more likely to feel the negative effects of lost productivity resulting from employees who want to leave, but are not able to find another job. Though an individual remains physically in a work role, they are likely to be disengaged from work (Wollard, 2011).

Customer satisfaction, profitability, and employee productivity were higher by double digits at organizations that had higher levels of employee engagement compared to organizations that had lower levels of employee engagement (Harter et al., 2002). Conversely, turnover (Agarwal, Datta, Blake-Beard, & Bhargava, 2012; Harter et al., 2002; Herman, Olivo, & Gioia, 2003, as cited in Wollard, 2011), absenteeism (Harter et al., 2002; Hoxsey, 2010), and safety issues (Harter et al., 2002) were lower by double digits in organizations that had higher levels of employee engagement compared to organizations that had lower levels of employee engagement (Harter et al., 2002). All of these areas impact an organization's ability to be profitable, which is important to business leaders.

Johnson (2011) and Wollard (2011) contend that there is also a correlation between deviant workplace behavior and employee disengagement. For example, decreased employee engagement leads to an increase in unethical behavior (e.g., fraud), which can cost an organization up to 5% of its revenue (Ratley, 2010, as cited in Wollard, 2011). Employees enter a relationship with an employer with an understanding and perception about their work, pay, and the organization as a whole. The greater the dissonance that occurs between the employee's perception of those areas and the day-to-day outcomes, the more likely employees will experience disengagement that leads to deviant, irregular, or lawless behavior, which is the opposite of OCB (Smith et al., 1983). This includes stealing, behaviors that detract from work, or misuse of time while on the job (Kulas, McInnerney, DeMuth, & Jadwinski, 2007, as cited in Wollard, 2011). Disengagement is very costly to business leaders.

When it comes to engagement and disengagement, context matters. Employees withdraw and engage themselves intermittently based on the tasks and the situations that are presented to them in a work environment (Kahn, 1990). When this withdrawal and engagement occurs,

employees bring and take away varying degrees of themselves based on the circumstance and what is needed at the time. Employee engagement is not static. Like two dancers swaying to the ebb and flow of the music and the energy around them, there is a natural push and pull away from and toward work based on the environment, demands of the task, psychological readiness, and alignment with the self and the role (Kahn, 1990). Therefore, the natural pull toward engagement in work is more likely to increase productivity and profit, whereas the natural push away and disengagement from work is more likely to reduce productivity and profit.

Disengagement can also occur when employers place employees in roles that result in a misalignment of their skills, talents, interests, and abilities (Clifton, 2011; Harter et al., 2002; Rath, 2007). When an employee is disengaged from work, it is likely that the worker is leaving a part of themselves out of the work being conducted. This can cause a disconnection emotionally, physically, or cognitively from a work role or task (Kahn, 1990). Motivation decreases when the self is not aligned with the work (Kahn, 1990; Maslow, 1954; Pink, 2009). When an employee's true self becomes disconnected from their work role, the more likely the employee is to be disengaged from the work needing to be done (Clifton, 2011; Kahn, 1990; Wollard, 2011). For example, when observing a musician, such as the first violinist in an orchestra, it is easy to both hear and see the symbiotic relationship that flows through the instrument, the music, the other musicians, and the conductor to produce a harmonious symphony. To be successful, the violinist must be fully engaged emotionally, cognitively, and physically in the role of the first violinist. Subsequently, being a first violinist requires the role and the self to be one. Conversely, if the individual was moved from the role of a first violinist, and asked to be a percussionist, or taken from the orchestra all together, and asked to fix engines in a garage, try as they might to adapt to this new role, a decrease in motivation and energy would likely occur (Kahn, 1990) because the

task does not align with the self and the individual's skills, talents, and interests. Eventually, the disconnection from who the person is, and their role, will cause a natural push away from the work, if not physically, then emotionally and cognitively (Kahn, 1990). The same is true for the professor, the accountant, and the employee on an assembly line. When the work role and the self are in line, greater engagement occurs; conversely, when the work role and the self are misaligned, greater disengagement occurs (Clifton, 2011; Harter et al., 2002; Kahn, 1990; Wollard, 2011).

Kahn (1990) painted a vivid picture of disengagement at work when he described it as a period of time when an individual “withdraws and defends” (p. 692) from what is happening around them. It brings to mind a picture of a boxer putting up his hands to shield himself physically, emotionally, or cognitively from what is occurring and slowly withdrawing and moving backward in an attempt to create space to preserve the self from what is happening in the ring. The picture of disengagement in work is a gradual withering away from the task or role to preserve the true self (Kahn, 1990; Wollard, 2011). The act of an employee disengaging from work paints a powerful picture for the leader and how this disengagement may negatively impact the employee, their work, and the organization and why using employee engagement survey results to make decisions is important to organizational success.

Antecedents to Worker Engagement

To avoid disengaged employees who are “weary, unproductive, and skeptical” (Wollard, 2011, pp. 12-13), business leaders should understand what motivates employees and what leads to greater engagement and performance (Maslow, 1954; Masson et al., 2008; Pink, 2009), as well as the antecedents that lead to engagement (Saks, 2006). Employees show greater engagement when they feel listened to, perceive supportive leadership, have their needs met on a

consistent basis, are fairly compensated, are acknowledged for good work, have adequate levels of autonomy and creativity, understand their purpose in relationship to organizational goals, and are using their skills and talents on a consistent basis (Harter et al., 2002; Heldenbrand & Simms, 2012; Kahn, 1990; Pink, 2009; Rath, 2007; Shuck et al., 2011). This is critical information that employers should attend to when considering the antecedents of employee engagement when viewing employee engagement survey results.

Engagement leads to well-being and greater feelings of personal fulfillment. According to Kahn (1990), the psychological state of an individual impacts the engagement commitment. As discussed earlier, Kahn (1990) believes that there are three psychological conditions that occur between individuals and their work role that impact engagement—meaningfulness, safety, and availability. This feeling of psychological connection means employees are more engaged in their work. It is important to note that employees who have greater feelings of psychological well-being are less likely to leave their jobs (Shuck et al., 2011). Based on the high cost of turnover, this is a significant financial consideration for business leaders.

From a psychological perspective, engagement and job fit (Shuck et al., 2011) is an “autotelic experience” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1974, as cited in Pink, 2009). *Auto*, in this case, means self, and *telos* means goal or purpose. When a person is deeply involved in an autotelic (engaged) activity or role, the goal is purely to feel self-fulfilled. When self-fulfillment becomes the goal, the experience or activity itself is the reward. Therefore, any resulting title, status, success or even financial remuneration is simply a byproduct of the greater goal of self-fulfillment (Pink 2009). This “autotelic experience” is similar to an athlete in the “zone” whose main focus is the challenge of beating the immediate opponent before them.

Employees must be placed in the correct role (job fit) and assigned the proper tasks that fit with the employee's skills, talents, and interests for full engagement to occur (Clifton, 2011; Shuck et al., 2011). Csikszentmihalyi (1996) described engagement as the psychological flow of emotion and cognition in harmony with the body. He stated, "Flow is an almost effortless yet highly focused state of consciousness" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 9). Flow is the intense mingling of thoughts, feelings, and actions that naturally produce a desired outcome. Flow arrives unconsciously in an individual, when the challenge between what *might be* intersects with the raw energy, effort, and ingenuity needed to make the idea come to life. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) explained: "In flow, people lived so deeply in the moment, and felt so utterly in control, that their sense of time, place, and even self—melted away." When flow (engagement) occurs, there is an organic synergy between what needs to be done and the skills and abilities that are needed to make it happen. It is a state that needs no manager's prodding or extrinsic motivating reward because the task at hand leads the way and the unconscious drive, and the ability to do work that is creative, is the only motivation that is needed (Maslow, 1954; Pink, 2009). When people are creative, they tend to more fully enjoy their work (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Pink, 2009). Employees who are placed in the correct role and assigned the proper tasks will be more likely to live in flow and have an autotelic experience, thereby experiencing greater work engagement. Business leaders, therefore, may benefit by understanding the power of these concepts to bring about greater profits, and to produce more satisfied employees who are less likely to leave their jobs.

The Role of the Engagement Survey

If employers are to reach their desired business outcomes, they face the challenge of not only attracting and hiring top talent and employees who are fully engaged (Clinton, 2010; Macey

& Schneider, 2008; Shuck & Wollard, 2010), but they must also consider how to retain them long term. In many ways, the 21st century worker is “redefining the relationship between employer and employee” (Heger, 2007, p. 121). Top talent is looking for more than a paycheck and benefits. In essence, employees are looking at the personal and professional value proposition that being a member of a particular organization and taking a specific role offers them personally and professionally (Heger, 2007). Heger (2007) describes engagement as “what employees think and feel about their work” (p. 122) in relation to the organization. One way that organizational leaders can better understand what employees think and feel about their work to retain their talent long term is to conduct an employee engagement survey and consider the results as the voice of the employee when making organizational decisions (Clifton, 2011; Gable et al, 2010; Harter et al., 2002; Ready & Truelove, 2011; Saks & Gruman, 2011; Walker, 2012).

Summary

Employees should be at the heart of creating an organization’s story (Ready & Truelove, 2011). Surveys tell a story in a way that may never be told otherwise. The results generated from the survey tell the part of the story as they relate to the employees. How these results are likely to influence the business leader’s decisions regarding the employees and the organizations tell the rest of the story. When used effectively, employee engagement survey results can aid employers by telling “a compelling story of the company’s future and a collaborative process for building the capabilities to achieve it” (Ready & Truelove, 2011, p. 97). Therefore, measuring engagement should not be a one-time event, but embedded within the very fabric of the organization (Harter et al., 2002; Ready & Truelove, 2011; Rice et al., 2012; Walker, 2012).

Leadership plays a critical role in the employee engagement survey process (Gable et al., 2010; Ready & Truelove, 2011; Rice et al., 2012; Walker, 2012). If leadership perceives the

engagement survey results to be of value, there is a greater chance the survey will be used to help make organizational decisions. Additionally, leadership must support the efforts for the survey and results to bring the greatest value (Gable et al., 2010; Walker, 2012). A critical error for business leaders is that the survey becomes an end in itself and that they do nothing with the survey results. When this happens, employees do not feel heard and it is likely to result in greater disengagement among employees (Gable et al., 2010; Walker, 2012). It is important that business leaders keep in mind that employees view the survey as an opportunity to influence change by sharing their thoughts and ideas, as well as their challenges and frustrations, about their work. Engaged employees take this opportunity seriously because they are driven to succeed by intrinsic motivators and need an environment that will help them succeed (Pink, 2009; Gabel et al., 2010). Gable et al. (2010) stated, “An engaged employee is a high-quality performer who takes personal responsibility to work toward the success of the organization” (p. 17). Being able to give input and feel listened to are critical to building trust between the employee and leader, a major theme found in the transformational leader (Commer, MacKenzie, & Podsakoof, 1996; Hoyt & Blascovich, 2013).

Business leaders should have a plan to communicate employee engagement survey results to their employees (Rice et al., 2012; Walker, 2012). This includes the purpose of the survey, how the results will be communicated, the time frame, and the action steps that will be taken upon completion (Gable et al., 2010; Rice et al., 2012; Walker, 2012). Sharing the engagement results with employees both through email and then in a meeting has greater value to the employees than just via email alone, as it increases the perception of the importance of the survey by those in leadership (Gable et al., 2010; Walker, 2012). A promise from leadership to address the concerns of the employees is the glue that holds the organization together, and it

serves as an important leadership catalyst to producing higher engagement levels (Ready & Truelove, 2011; Rice et al., 2012; Walker, 2012). Highly engaged employees may have a positive impact on the bottom line of an organization. Therefore, employee engagement surveys and the results should be factored into the overall scheme of organizational development (Gable et al., 2010; Walker, 2012).

Part III. Literature Analysis and Discussion

When considering employee engagement and OCB, it might be natural to assume that the responsibility for good citizenship behavior and employee engagement or disengagement falls to the employee. After all, it is employees who are responsible for their thoughts, emotions, and actions toward their work, their day-to-day tasks, interacting with clients and co-workers, showing up and leaving on time, and fulfilling job responsibilities. This is true, and employees *should* take responsibility for their own engagement, as this impacts their career path and personal satisfaction (Rice et al., 2012). It may be argued though that the responsibility for employee engagement and OCB falls equally to the business leaders based on the decisions they make regarding the employees and the organization (Bommer, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 1996; Rice et al., 2012). Engagement is a shared responsibility by both the employee and business leaders (Rice et al., 2012). It is understood that organizational leaders are responsible to oversee the profit margins, satisfy board members or shareholders, and create business plans that meet organizational objectives. Employers would be remiss though if they were to assume that employees do not have a direct impact on profit or fail to consider the link that employee engagement and disengagement have to a profit and loss column (Harter et al., 2002).

As discussed in Chapter 1, business leaders may benefit from being aware of the three assets that generate organizational profit—financial (cash or tradable securities), physical

(property or equipment), and intangible (customer capital, social capital, and human capital), not just financial and physical capital. Based on the financial and physical assets, it could be argued that the company is in good shape financially and poised for long-term growth. However, it is possible that this may be anything from the truth if the *intangible* assets (customer, social, and human capital) are in shambles and not factored into the financial analysis.

Based on the literature presented, scholars and practitioners have argued that there is a link between employee engagement, disengagement, and profitability (Harter et al., 2002; Wollard, 2011). This comes keenly into focus when viewing these arguments through the lens of intangible assets, such as human, customer, and social capital (Noe et al., 2010). It is important to note that employees are concerned with organizational profit, but they likely approach profit from a different perspective than organizational leaders. Though organizational profit is important, employees are primarily concerned with meeting their personal financial needs over that of their employer's (Maslow, 1943, 1954). When an employee's financial needs are met through their salary and compensation package, then they are able to move toward self-actualization (Maslow, 1943, 1954) and are able to bring more of themselves to their work role (Kahn, 1990; Maslow, 1943, 1954). On the other hand, when employees' personal financial needs are not met through their salary and compensation package, the primary focus will be to meet those needs, thereby bringing less of themselves (Kahn, 1990; Maslow, 1943, 1954) to work, which may lead to less employee productivity and profitability of the organization. Once an employee's compensation needs are satisfied, they are more likely to be motivated intrinsically to engage in the task and role for the autotelic experience, not by extrinsic rewards or punitive measures (Cskiszentmihalyi, 1974, as cited in Pink, 2009; Cskiszentmihalyi, 1997; Maslow, 1954; Pink, 2009). If employees are engaged and able to bring their full selves into a

role or task (Kahn, 1990), there is a greater likelihood that the employee (human capital) will bring more of themselves to interactions with both customers (customer capital) and colleagues (social capital), thereby increasing the likelihood of productivity and profit. On the other hand, if an employee is disengaged and does not bring themselves fully into a role or task (Kahn, 1990), there is a greater likelihood that an employee (human capital) will bring less of themselves into an interaction with both customers (customer capital) and colleagues (social capital), thereby decreasing the likelihood of productivity and profit. It is a leader's responsibility to find out what is keeping employees from being able to bring their full self into a role or task. Understanding employee engagement survey results is an important step for leaders to identify how invested employees are in their work.

Based on the literature discussed, it could be debated that to leave out the results generated by employee engagement surveys (which measure the intangible assets of social, customer, and human capital) leads to an inaccurate measurement of an organization's overall financial health. It could be maintained that employers are obligated to the shareholder and key stakeholders to measure and present employee engagement survey results in order to provide a full account of the organizational assets.

Finally, it is not enough for leaders to simply conduct a yearly employee survey. The survey is not an end in itself. There must be a commitment on the part of the leaders to be fully engaged in all aspects of the survey from deployment, results analysis, presentation of results, and creation of a plan to address areas that need improvement. Considering that intangible assets make up fully one-third of the assets that impact productivity and profit, leaders would be remiss if they were not committed to the employee engagement survey process.

Conclusion

When considering the intersection of employee disengagement, OCB, and leadership decisions, organizational leaders can no longer choose to ignore, feign ignorance, or make excuses that they are too busy to attend to employee engagement. To capture the most robust financial picture of the organization to satisfy financial stakeholders, it is a necessity to embrace all aspects of the employee engagement survey. Although this may run counter to conventional business practice, business leaders may benefit the organization by fostering greater engagement among their employees. When high levels of engagement occur, business leaders also stand to benefit, because they are more likely to experience greater employee productivity and financial profit—potentially a true win-win for all involved.

CHAPTER 3—RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the experiences of business leaders to better understand how these leaders use employee engagement survey results to make decisions about their organization. The knowledge generated from this study is useful for employee engagement researchers, as well as practitioners (e.g., HR professionals and business leaders), to give them insight into how leaders use engagement survey results to make decisions.

A qualitative case study was used to address the research questions and to gather a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied. The participants for this study consisted of managers, mid-level executives, and senior executives from a medium-size global organization with approximately 1,500 employees located in the U.S. The semi-structured interview questions, coupled with the leaders' answers, provided insight into answering the study's central question: *How do business leaders use employee engagement survey results to make decisions?*

A case study approach was used to conduct this research. The case study approach has been most successfully used with “contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (Yin, 2003, p. 1) that adds to the knowledge of a phenomenon, whether it be a group, individual, organization, political, or social structure through an explanatory, exploratory, or descriptive case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Boblin, Ireland, Kirkpatrick, & Robertson, 2013; Yin, 2003).

In answering the main research question, the probing questions constructed during the interviews were interpreted through the theoretical framework found in the normative decision model (Vroom & Yetton, 1973). The normative decision model (Vroom & Yetton, 1973) is listed among the contingency theories. A contingency theory within this context will “describe how aspects of the leadership situation alter a leader's influence on an individual subordinate or

a work group” (Yukl, 2011, p. 286).

The use of the normative decision model (Vroom & Yetton, 1973) assisted in identifying how leaders made decisions. As stated, the main research question explored was: *How do business leaders use employee engagement survey results to make decisions?* With a desire to collect authentic responses, the researcher explored deeper into leaders’ answers. Probing questions were used to get a better understanding of the leader’s role within the organization and ultimately answer the research question. For example, the researcher asked participants to share important information such as:

1. Share with me your title and briefly describe your role.
2. Describe what it feels like to be a part of this organization.
3. How would you define employee engagement?
4. What have you learned about engagement in your organization?
5. What about did you think about the employee engagement survey?
6. Do you believe the results of the survey will make any impact on your organization?

These questions were used to provide the structure and create opportunities for additional questions that explored deeper into the actual realities of these participants (see Appendix A for complete list of questions).

Qualitative Research Approach

This qualitative research study utilized the constructivism-interpretivism paradigm to explore business leader decisions. Research paradigms help to inform, structure, and direct research (Butin, 2010) and can be powerful tools that “set the context for an investigator’s study” (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 128). Paradigms are particularly powerful research tools in philosophical areas of science, including ontology, axiology, epistemology, and rhetorical structure

(Ponterotto, 2005). By viewing these areas of science through a particular paradigm, the researcher gained a greater depth of understanding of how to formulate the research study and analyze the data. For greater flexibility within this study and to properly align the study with elements of constructivism, this study used qualitative methods (e.g., in-depth interviews).

Constructivist researchers desire to interpret the meaning behind what is occurring to the participants (Sciarra, 1999, as cited in Ponterotto, 2005)—in this case, the organizational leaders being interviewed. Additionally, the constructivist approach allowed the researcher enough flexibility during the research process to make adjustments based on observation and research flow. An important component of the constructivism-interpretivism approach is the awareness of bias—addressed later in this chapter—and the connection between the researcher and objects of the study (Ponterotto, 2005). It is this connection between researcher and object (leaders) that produced the qualitative research that allowed for the human element to be considered throughout the study.

In conjunction with the constructivism-interpretivism paradigm, a case study was conducted. Case studies have been used successfully in a number of fields, including anthropology, political science, psychology, and economics, and are also common methods of data gathering and analysis in dissertations and thesis research (Yin, 2003). A case study methodology was appropriate for this research investigation because the researcher addressed one central question: *How do business leaders use employee engagement survey results to make decisions?* This case study used a bounded system approach. Both Yin (2003) and Stake (2005) support using a bounded system approach to avoid trying to answer a question that is too broad (Baxter & Jack, 2008). With a bounded case approach, the research is constrained by certain elements (e.g., time, location, participants, and organization) to help provide structure and focus

(Creswell, 2013). The objective is to find out how the answer to the research question fit within a lesser understood story about the use of employee engagement survey results by leaders. It was necessary that the case study be carefully designed to mitigate any criticism of the research method (Yin, 2003).

Study Design

Following the Institution Review Board (IRB) approval, the researcher solicited volunteer leaders within an organization who had direct access to the employee engagement survey results. An email with consent forms and study explanation was sent directly to participants. Once participants were identified, invitations were sent by email outlining the date and time of the interviews. The interviews focused on answering the research question: *How do business leaders use employee engagement survey results to make decisions?* The interviews consisted of 10 subject questions that addressed the purpose of the research question and were conducted in an approximately 60-minute recorded conversation. The leaders interviewed all had access to the most recent employee engagement survey results. Interviews were recorded, stored electronically, and transcribed by using the transcriptionists at the website Rev.com. A copy of the transcribed interviews was provided to the participants for review and accuracy. Data coding then took place.

A single-case design was used to conduct the research. A single-case design study is justified and comparable to conducting a single experiment (Yin, 2003). The type of sampling that occurred was a typical case that “highlights what is normal or average” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 28) in a qualitative inquiry sampling strategy. Additionally, the rationale for using a single case study to conduct leadership research related to employee engagement survey results was that it would represent a typical “project, among many different

projects” (Yin, 2003, p. 41) within an organization. In this study, the employee engagement survey and the results gathered by the HR personnel is representative of a typical project conducted within an HR department within an organization and therefore provides further justification of the use of a single-case study design.

Participants

A sampling of leaders at various levels within the organization was conducted to provide the greatest insight into the phenomenon under consideration (Creswell, 2013) to align with the purpose of the study and the thesis question. To provide a broad perspective on the subject questions (Yin, 2003), a representative sample of leaders ($n = 7$) at various levels of the company who have survey results from the most recent employee engagement survey were identified.

The subject of the research study was an organization that provides semiconductor and life sciences equipment, materials, and support within the industry. The publically-traded organization operates in two major segments—semiconductor services and life science systems. The organization is located in North America, has been in operation for over 30 years, and employs approximately 1,500 individuals globally. The researcher began by asking the participant the following subject questions: (a) title, (b) number of years in this role, (c) number of years with the organization, and (d) number of direct reports. This line of questioning in the first half of the interview helped establish rapport between the interviewer and the participant (Creswell, 2013) and provided insight into the leader’s role and responsibilities as related to the two major divisions and where they sit as a leader within the organization. It also provided insight into the organization itself, including organizational culture and organizational charting.

Data Collection

Data collection was a critical element in the case study process and was well thought out

prior to the collection process. According to Creswell (2013), data collection is a detailed and exacting process, which includes “gaining permissions, conducting a good qualitative sampling strategy, developing means for recording information..., storing the data, and anticipating ethical issues that may arise” (p. 145). The data collected provide critical information that contributes to the “researcher’s understanding of the whole phenomenon” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 554). Solid research relies on principles that guide the data collection (Yin, 2003). Multiple sources of evidence (Tellis, 1997; Yin, 2003), the assembly of “a case study database” (Yin, 2003, p. 83), and showing “a chain of evidence” (Yin, 2003, p. 83) that will link the question, collected data, and conclusions are important to the data collection process (Yin, 2003). Laying a solid foundation for the data collection process and following protocol provides the groundwork for the interview process and is critical to gathering in-depth accurate data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The following principles guided the researcher in the data collection process. Data was collected in these phases:

- Phase 1: The researcher explained the study details and collaborated with the Human Resources Director and Senior Vice President to identify seven potential volunteer leaders.
- Phase 2: The consent form and study details were sent to identified leaders.
- Phase 3: Email invitations were sent to participants with the date and time of their individual interviews.
- Phase 4: 60-minute interviews were conducted and recorded.
- Phase 5: The recordings were transcribed by the transcription vendor Rev.com and were sent back to each participant for approval.

- Phase 6: The researcher conducted an analysis that included coding and theme identification.
- Phase 7: The coding and themes were viewed through the normative decision model (Vroom & Yetton, 1973) to identify study outcome, findings, and recommendations.

The data collection process included a systematic way to store the data so that it was secure, organized, and easily accessible to the researcher (Creswell, 2013). The researcher took special care to maintain the following storage of data: backed up transcription files (Davidson, 1996, as cited in Creswell, 2013), developed a list of the information gathered during the study to ensure the anonymity of the study participants throughout the data, and developed a collection matrix that help the researcher locate key elements of the study (Creswell, 2013). A high level of organization during the data collection process and careful storage proved to be immensely helpful in the next phase of the process—data analysis.

Data Analysis

Analytic methods are critical in the case study model (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Yin, 2003); therefore, careful thought was given to outlining priorities for what should be analyzed and identifying why this practice was necessary for the research process. With this in mind, the researcher analyzed the data carefully “by hand” with note taking, spread sheets, and by identifying patterns and themes as they emerged from the first-cycle coding and the second-cycle coding (Saldaña, 2013). This inductive bottom-up approach allowed the researcher to identify categories, patterns, and themes to distinguish “more abstract units of information” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 45).that were used throughout the analysis process. The bottom-up inductive method aided the researcher in getting to the heart of the research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This happened by considering the coded themes and how they were possibly connected

(Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This allowed the researcher not only to see patterns and how they matched (Yin, 2003), but also to look for themes and related concepts when more challenging questions were asked related to leadership decisions and the use of employee engagement survey results. By working back and forth between the patterns and categories, a more inclusive set of themes is likely to arise (Creswell, 2013). This back-and-forth analysis guided the researcher through an inductive analysis method that led to research outcomes, findings, and recommendations.

Ethical Considerations

It was important for the researcher to maintain proper ethics throughout the phases of this qualitative study (Creswell, 2013). To maintain the integrity of the research, ethical considerations were given to the processes employed prior, during, and following the study (Creswell, 2013). The researcher began by gaining approval from the IRB to begin the data collection process (Creswell, 2013). The researcher then identified a site that did not have a vested interest in the study outcomes and gained permission from the Vice President of Human Resources to solicit study participants. The researcher then explained the purpose of the study, which was outlined in the consent form presented to the IRB, making sure to be transparent about the study phases and participant involvement (Creswell, 2013). Since the organization is publicly traded, special care was taken in the anonymity of both the participants (pseudonyms) and the organization (Creswell, 2013). Within two weeks of the interview, the researcher shared the interview transcript directly with the participant via email.

Trustworthiness

It is important that a qualitative study demonstrate both reliability and validity (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2003). Multiple validation strategies were used to provide the highest level of study

trustworthiness (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2003). The first strategy used was triangulation.

Triangulation was used to corroborate evidence from several sources—in this case, multiple leaders’ perspectives on how employee engagement survey results were used—and to provide insight on a theme or viewpoint identified based on the research data analysis (Creswell, 2013). This triangulation of a theme or code from the different sources increased the trustworthiness of the data generated (Creswell, 2013). The second strategy used was the clarification of researcher bias. Bias clarification included past biases, prejudices, and researcher orientations that had the potential to influence the approach and study interpretations (Creswell, 2013).

Potential Researcher Bias

As I navigated personal constructs as they related to positionality, I saw that my role in scholarship was not to argue for my perspective, but to argue for the truth as presented in the literature and research outcomes (Machi & McEvoy, 2009). Kinchele and Steinberg (1998) wrote, “The idea that individuals construct an understanding of the world and perceive themselves to occupy a particular location within the reality they construe are key premises to positionality” (as cited in Parsons, 2008, p. 1129). Therefore, it was necessary to explore the impact that my positionality had on my scholarship and not inadvertently allow researcher bias to influence the study’s outcomes.

While working with business leaders for over eight years, it appeared that many business leaders were unaware of the effect that employee engagement and disengagement had on their organization. During that time, it was my goal to educate business leaders on this topic and the importance of giving employees a voice through engagement surveys, acting on the results, and by so doing, helping leaders understand how this practice of “listening” to their employees via the survey results may prove to benefit their employees and their organization.

I earned my undergraduate degree in elementary education, my master's degree in human services, and my doctoral focus is organizational leadership and communication. I view the world through an academic, helper, problem-solver perspective. Not only do I have a desire to teach what I have learned, but the “helper” in me also means I have a tendency to root for the underdog and feel everyone should have a voice. Employee engagement surveys are one way to give employees a voice—but only if leaders listen and act on the results. While reading Parsons (2008) and learning how her academic journey and experiences in the classroom colored her worldview and later influenced her research, I realized I needed to guard against potential preconceptions in my own research. It is my desire to educate business leaders on the effect that engagement and disengagement can have on their businesses and the importance of listening to their employees and acting on the results to increase engagement. This is where my preconceptions can influence my positionality and can slip unnoticed into my research if not checked. As researchers (Briscoe, 2005; Fennell & Arnot, 2008; Jupp & Slattery, 2010; Parsons, 2008) have noted, our experiences and perceptions form our positionality. Considering positionality as it relates to my topic and my desire to give employees a voice, it is easy to see how my education, personal experiences, and inclination toward helping professions may influence my positionality in these areas. Though rooting for the underdog and wanting everyone to have a voice is admirable, I cannot allow this desire to influence my research and interactions with organizational leaders.

As Fennel and Arnot (2008) have stated, it is not an easy journey to come to this level of self-awareness because it requires an honest look at intentions. As a researcher of employee engagement, I have had the unique opportunity to sit with hundreds of business leaders to discuss their organizational goals and their employees' needs and challenges. It is my bias that business

leaders and managers alike routinely lack the skills or sense of awareness necessary to recognize their employees' needs and challenges and act on them, thereby perpetuating greater disengagement among workers. Despite the research that shows that employees are likely to become disengaged workers when managers consistently fail to attend to their workplace needs and challenges (Harter et al., 2002; Wollard, 2008, 2011), I have come to realize that there is often a significant disconnect between leadership's *perception* of the needs and challenges of their employees, and their employees' *actual* needs and challenges, and that is what makes measuring employee engagement important. The unfortunate outcome of this disconnect is that employees do not feel heard and can become unmotivated, unproductive, and disengaged (Clifton, 2011; Shuck & Wollard, 2010; Wollard, 2011). When employees become disengaged from their work, it is less likely that business leaders will achieve their organizational goals.

CHAPTER 4—FINDINGS

Chapter 4 is a description of data gathered from the seven leadership interviews that were conducted at a medium-sized global organization in North America and that form the basis for this qualitative case study. Yin (2003) explains that a case study is of “a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context” (p. 13). Within the context of the day-to-day operations of the organization being researched, this study seeks to understand how business leaders used employee engagement survey data to make decisions. The qualitative data for this study were gathered by conducting semi-structured interviews in which the leader participants were asked a series of questions, as discussed later in this chapter, related to their 2016 employee engagement survey results and how the leaders used this information to inform their decisions. Rubin and Rubin (2012) describe semi-structured interviews as “extended conversations between researcher and interviewee” (p. 31). The semi-structured interview questions, coupled with the leaders’ answers, provided insight into answering the study’s central question: *How do business leaders use employee engagement survey results to make decisions?* This chapter will discuss the participants, the first- and second-cycle coding of data, the themes that emerged as a result of the data analysis, and will briefly mention the findings discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Participants

The participants, who were all given pseudonyms for this study, were managers, mid-level executives, and senior executives from a medium-sized global organization with approximately 1,500 employees located in the Northeast region of the United States. The organization consists of two major divisions comprising multiple business units that collectively support their life sciences and semiconductor businesses. The semi-structured leader interviews consisted of six face-to-face interviews and one phone interview. These leadership interviews

took place over a 2-day period approximately two months after the employee engagement survey was administered and approximately six weeks after the leaders received the survey results for their respective team, business unit, or the entire organization, depending on their level of leadership responsibility or involvement with the deployment and distribution of survey results. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), in qualitative research, semi-structured interviews should take place at a scheduled time. These interviews should plan for an extended conversation to occur between the interviewer and the interviewee. Probing questions should also be used to provide the researcher with vivid details and to provide context regarding the research topic (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Structuring the interviews in this manner also assisted the researcher in using the normative decision model (Vroom & Yetton, 1973) to better understand how the leaders used employee engagement survey data as the voice of the employees to make decisions about the organization.

The following is a brief description of the leader participants and their roles, responsibilities, and length of service with the organization (see Table 4.1 for a summary). As mentioned above, in accordance with the IRB directive to do no harm when conducting research, each volunteer participant described below was assigned a pseudonym for anonymity purposes. As discussed in Chapter 3, a sampling of leaders at various levels within the organization was conducted to provide the greatest insight into the phenomenon under consideration (Creswell, 2013) and to align with the purpose of the study and the thesis question. To provide a broad perspective on the subject questions (Yin, 2003), a representative sample of leaders ($n = 7$) at various levels of the company were identified who had survey results from the most recent employee engagement survey.

Table 4.1

Summary of Participants

Pseudonym	Job Title	Role	Years With Company	Supervises Others
Tom	Director of Technical Support	Executive Leader	1 to 4 years	Yes
Urmgard	Director of Supplier quality	Executive Leader	1 to 4 years	Yes
Hanna	HR Manager	Management	5 to 9 years	Yes
Ren	Senior VP for Quality Engineering	Senior Executive	5 to 9 years	Yes
Buddy	Senior VP Human Resources	Senior Executive	10 to 15 years	Yes
Connie	Senior Human Resources Manager/Human Resources Business Partner	Senior Management	10 to 15 years	No
Cassie	Chief Information Officer	Senior Executive	16+ years	Yes

Connie

Connie, a senior-level manager, has been with the organization about 10 years and serves in a split role capacity as the Senior Human Resources Manager/Human Resources Business Partner. She supports finance, corporate functions, the Chief Financial Officer's (CFO) organization, and the global sales organization. She is also responsible for talent development and organizational capability and training. Her corporate functional role also requires that she oversee employee engagement (including all aspects of the engagement survey), employee development, and performance management. She works closely with the Senior Vice President of Human Resources, leadership at various levels of the organization, the regional business unit HR business partners, and HR specialists. She also oversees the administration of the learning management system.

Tom

Tom, an executive-level leader, has been with the company two years and is the Director

of Technical Support. He is responsible for the Corporate University in the domestic and global training facilities. His group ensures that the global service managers, commercial service engineers, and customer service engineers have field readiness from a training and knowledge perspective. He is responsible for technical product support, which solves customer field issues and escalations.

Hanna

Hanna has been with the organization for nearly six years and is the Human Resources Manager. Hanna is responsible for supporting the senior leadership of the life science division of the company. She also works closely with other HR professionals to manage the annual engagement survey.

Buddy

Buddy, a senior executive leader, has been with the organization 11 years and is the Senior Vice President of Human Resources. He is responsible for leading and optimizing the company's global human resource talent by establishing and growing a culture of engagement and performance.

Urmgard

Urmgard, an executive leader, has been with the organization for almost three years and is the Director of Supplier Quality. She is responsible for the quality of global suppliers, their product support performance, and their responsiveness to any kind of issues that arise. She is also responsible for quality training and ensuring that suppliers know and understand key product requirements.

Cassie

Cassie, a senior executive leader, has been with the organization 16 years and is the Chief

Information Officer. She leads all the activities involving global business information processes and systems that keep all of the phones, mobile devices, and computers running for the corporate employees located worldwide. She is also responsible for leading the implementation of major engineering and business systems that support day-to-day global operations.

Ren

Ren, a senior-level executive leader, has been with the organization seven years and is the Senior Vice President for Quality Engineering. He is responsible for engineering and quality within the semiconductor side of the business and leads the entire product life cycle. Aside from engineering and quality, he oversees program management, which is accountable for training, new product development, and technical support services.

Codes, Themes, and Data Analysis

After completing the interviews and transcribing them via Rev.com, a third-party vendor, the data were closely culled by using a process of first- and second-cycle coding. The first- and second-cycle coding made it easier to analyze the interview data and identify data themes (see Table 4.2). “Coding in a qualitative inquiry” explains Saldaña (2013, p. 3) is simply “a word or short phrase that serves as a symbol that seeks to capture the essence of a particular visual or data that is language based” (p. 3). Second-level coding was also conducted. The second-level coding provided a fuller picture of the data that evolved from the interviews (Saldaña, 2013). The first- and second-level coding led to the identification of a series of themes that formed the basis for much of the discussion that follows in the remainder of Chapter 4. Saldaña (2013) explains, “A theme is an outcome of coding, categorization or analytic reflection” (p. 14). The first- and second-cycle coding, followed by careful analysis, resulted in the identification of seven themes that provide a better understanding of the leaders, the organization, and how the business leaders

Table 4.2

Summary of Codes

Codes/Themes	Descriptors	Statement Samples
Organizational Culture	C	"Sometimes it can feel a bit out of control."
Survey Frequency	SF	"Approximately every 18 months"
Survey Distribution	SD	"It's done at the same time, company-wide."
Employee Perception of Survey Process	EEP	"Pockets of people who may have some fear about what's going to be done with the data." "Can this be traceable?"
Definition of Employee Engagement	D	"It's about passion... getting up in the morning and just feeling energy about coming to work." "It's idea generation. It's creativity."
Leadership Learning	LL	"For the most part, it's a very engaged organization."
Frustrated Leadership	FL	"It's not going to be a flip of a switch in order to move the needle." "It perplexed me because people feel good about many of the behaviors that go into the core values, yet when you ask them about the core values overall, they do not feel as good about how they [values] are exemplified."
Confirmed Suspicions	CS	"The results for the question that pertained to the company's core values and do we live them were very low."
Surprised Leadership	SL	"I try to think about, 'Okay, how can we promote what we're doing?' That's how it affects my decisions in terms of communications."
Leadership Decision/Action	LD	
Leadership Decided Not to Act on Results	ND	"It's not representative of the whole company."
Most Useful About Data	MU	"The data helps us to get that ownership down in the organization a little bit lower."
Lacking in the Survey Process	L	"The action planning that's got to follow"
Change About the Survey Process	CP	"Not the tool itself and process. It's really good."

used employee engagement survey results to make decisions.

Themes

In this section, the major themes that emerged from the participant comments during the semi-structured interviews are discussed. The comments in this section provided the researcher with a better understanding of how the leaders view their organization, the survey process, the results, and how the leaders used the survey results to make decisions. It is important

to note for consistency that although all leaders were asked the same questions to help identify the themes discussed in this section, not every answer a leader provided during the interviews will be highlighted in this section.

Theme 1. Culture: Big company with a start-up feel. To understand how business leaders used the employee engagement survey results to make decisions, it was important to get an understanding of the organization's culture. The organization consists of approximately 1,500 employees worldwide and comprises two major business units. The two business units were formed over the years through a multitude of acquisitions in the life sciences and semiconductor industries. All leaders were asked the same questions. When they were asked to describe the culture at the organization, the sheer number of acquisitions appeared to influence their answers and provide clarity to their unique culture. When describing the culture of the organization, leaders used phrases such as, "Sometimes it feels out of control," and "It feels fast-paced—constant changing priorities," or "No systematic approach... we are completely reactive," to explain the culture. This section provides additional insight into the organization's culture based on the leaders' comments.

Leaders were asked the question: How would you describe the culture of the organization and what it feels like to work here? Ren explained the culture this way: "There are two companies at the heart of [the organization], but [the two companies] constantly acquire and try to add small companies." He went on to say, "The impression is, we are a big company or established. But culturally there's still this small company mentality." This is due in large part to the number of acquisitions and the mixture of cultures that have occurred over the years. Other leaders also felt the impact of the acquisitions on culture. Urmgard explained the impact:

You can really feel the company is a combination of 35 acquisitions, so it's disjointed. There are some elements that are disjointed. I think the company has some contradictory

strategies... and the best way for me to explain this is that, in some respects, we have very tight, strict, rigid processes, and in other areas, it's completely wide open—where we have a lot of elements that are very much start-up, entrepreneurial.

Cassie, who has been with the organization for 16 years, shared this example of the magnitude of acquisitions during her tenure with the organization and the impact on the organization's culture: "Well, it's an acquisition company. [For example], when I came here, there were 26 acquisitions in two years...." Hanna's explanation was particularly insightful, as she compared the acquisitions and the organization's culture to that of a multinational blended family with all of the uniqueness and challenge that comes with such a combination: "It's a unique culture. The organization is basically made up of acquisitions. What I want to say is, it's like a blended family, right?" To further the family analogy, she explained:

You've got unique personalities, you've got people who work together as a team—they were a family, so to speak, and now, you're trying to bring and blend it together in one while preserving obviously the things that made them very successful in their culture, but yet, trying to unify into a common organization with common values and focus. Again, on top of that, then, as most global companies do, you've got the cultural aspect of just being in different regional areas.

Urmgard explained, "When you're here and you're trying to navigate [the culture made up of multiple acquisitions], I think it takes an interesting combination of skillsets to be successful here to be impacting... knowing and understanding how to navigate the nuances." Understanding how to navigate the social norms associated with so many smaller companies housed within one seems to have cultural challenges, as the leaders expressed.

When leaders were asked to describe the culture, several of the leaders responded with a follow up question: "The company's culture or my [business unit/department's] culture?" The impact the acquisitions had on the employees and how the organization functioned was a common theme among those interviewed, with the exception of the senior leader of HR, who did not discuss culture or the impact the acquisitions had on the culture. This theme is relevant when

considering the organization's cultural context in which the employees are taking the employee engagement survey and the leaders are making decisions based on those survey results.

Understanding the organization's culture provides the context in which the leaders are making decisions. Rubin and Rubin (2012) explain that although topic interviews such as these are focused on employee engagement surveys and leadership decisions, they also have elements of cultural interviews. This means that, by asking questions surrounding culture, the researcher has a better opportunity to learn about the underlying reasons behind leadership decisions. In this case, it revealed the impact that multiple acquisitions was having on employees, their survey results, and how the leaders made decisions within this context. By asking this clarifying question, leaders were providing the researcher information on the fragmentation of the organization's culture due to the number of acquisitions. This information and how it impacted decisions may not have been uncovered without a direct discussion surrounding culture. This discussion led to the second theme that revealed a crisis of identity within the organization due to the number of acquisitions. As the research data were analyzed to gain a better understanding of the organization's culture and how this impacted leadership decisions, it led to the second theme.

Theme 2. Identity crisis: Who are we? The crisis of identity emerged as a theme during the interview when the researcher inquired about the organization's culture. What consistently came up in the interviews was the word *identity*. Specifically, the leaders discussed how the employees struggled with a lack of organizational identify. This identity crisis came from the large number of acquisitions and the resulting turnover within the organization. This theme can provide some information on how this identity crisis may have impacted the leaders' decisions when considering employee engagement survey results.

For example, Hanna shared, "The number one challenge that I've seen, and this was very

much represented in our [survey] data, is that people struggle with an identity. They don't know who they belong to any more and they will tell you that." The impact of the acquisitions on the organizations' identity was due in some part to the high level of voluntary and involuntary turnover. The comments from the leaders based on the survey provided a glimpse into how they used this information to understand their employees and how this understanding may have impacted their decisions. Cassie explained:

We have suffered in recent years from a lot of turnover in entire areas of the company. What happens is that if you have really deep turnover in the department, you have an influx of a whole bunch of new people and no one to tell them how things work.

Additionally, the acquisitions seemed challenging for the employees that came to the company through an acquisition as they struggled to adapt to the new organization and a new identity. Some seemed to feel a sense of loss related to their old identity. When it came to the employees who were acquired and asked to assimilate, Hanna shared that "things that are important to them... like a logo, their company name" are aspects of identity that were important to the employees, but that they no longer had after an acquisition. Cassie echoed this sentiment about their sense of loss of identity due to an acquisition: "[New employees] come in and... they want things to work the way that they worked in their old company [before they were acquired]." As a result, the acquired employees struggle to adjust to their new identity even though they may be surrounded by many of their peers who came to the organization as a result of the acquisition. Connie provided insight on the survey feedback from the employees' perspective: "We did have feedback, for example, our life science organizations, employees acquired into... not feeling that they can identify with [the company]... and not feeling the connection or fit." This feeling of disconnection and a lack of identity was consistent among the comments of the leaders, although the Senior Vice President of Human Resources did not express this view.

Cassie explained the level of disconnection employees in her division seemed to be feeling when viewing the organization and leadership from outside of that division:

One [example] was that my employees emphatically trust and work hard for their bosses. [The employees] feel engaged with their bosses. They trust them. They're happy with jobs related to their bosses, but they expressed frustration in the company, which I think are in specific areas [connection through identity].

Another leader expressed a similar perception of employees feeling disconnected and how this underscores the confusion surrounding the core values and their sense of identity regarding the organization. Connie stated when considering the survey results, "[Survey results] perplexed me because people feel good about many of the behaviors that go into the core values, yet when you ask them about the core values overall, they're not feeling as good about how they are exemplified."

Cassie also described the employees' perspectives expressed in the survey results as feeling disconnected from the organization outside of their business unit or department:

One of the things that came out in the survey that was pretty interesting is that when people were talking about their function or their department or group, it was fairly positive, but when they talk about the company overall, it wasn't very positive. That clearly points to the cross function that must be really broken, because if I'm in my happy little group, and I can't tell if that other little group is happy or functioning well... I think their frustration would be common across the organization.

Hanna recognized that the lack of identity also extended to the leadership team and, if left unchecked, could extend to customers. She stated:

I think [employee engagement survey results] gave us business leaders a sense of being sensitive to [a lack of identity through acquisitions], but yet, also trying to design a roadmap that says, but we have to get to a common identity because our customers want to see one company, not mixed.

This lack of identity seemed to have a negative effect on how some employees viewed the organization. Connie shared this insight:

There seems to be negativity about the company, either when you talk about people's

work environments... working within their team, working with their manager, everything's great. We're having a good time, but yet [employees] have these negative perceptions about my company.

Hanna indicated that this lack of identity and sense of feeling disconnected was not solely reflective of the feelings of the non-management employees, but also extended to members of the leadership team in conversations among leaders. Hanna provided insight into this:

Again, you even saw this [identity crisis] in discussions with the leadership team. I think they even struggle with identity crisis. Just how do I fit with the other leaders, how do I work and collaborate and how does our organization start to work together?

These are questions that are left hanging in the air. It is unclear to what extent this information impacts the leaders' decision-making when viewing employee engagement survey results, although it is apparent that the leaders are aware of how this lack of identity is reflected in the survey results. It appears that Hanna felt that answering these questions was critical to organizational success by stating:

We've got to cultivate a united identity and how we do that with all of these companies coming together, and also just how we work more collaboratively in teams... continue to engage employees so that they feel more connected as an organization.

On the cultural identity crisis, Urmgard shared, "It's like the company doesn't have a soul."

It was interesting that the leaders seemed to understand the negative impact the acquisitions were having on their employees and that they were aware that this was reflected in employee engagement survey results. With regard to the survey results, they made specific references to how the acquisitions impacted employees in such ways as turnover, the sense of loss felt by employees to their former organizations, and the lack of connection to the organization. This provided a lens into how the leaders viewed the survey results and made decisions based on that knowledge.

Theme 3: Leadership insights into survey results. Leadership perceptions and learning

surrounding employee engagement survey results will be discussed in this section. Leadership insights explain what the leaders expressed they learned from employee engagement survey results. This provided some clarity on how this information may have influenced leader decisions.

Leadership learning. What leaders learned varied depending on their role and level within the organization. This was reflective in their answers and comments during the in-depth interviews. Leadership learning took many forms based on the leader's perspective and where the leader sits within the organization. For example, Connie, who oversees the survey process, seemed to have a bird's eye view of the organization and a comprehensive understanding of the employee engagement survey results from an HR perspective. She explained, "For the most part, it's a very engaged organization." After reading the results, Rob, a senior leader learned, "You can't over-communicate. I think having everyone feel that they have a voice is important. Brings ideas to the table." As discussed earlier, Hanna, an HR manager shared, "I think [the employee engagement survey results] gave business leaders a sense of being sensitive" to the impact that the acquisitions have had on the employees. Urmgard, a director, offered this explanation to what she learned through the employee engagement survey results: "[Employees] are just trying to do the best they can in this environment."

Upon viewing the employee engagement survey results, Urmgard also provided this awareness about her group and how the employee survey results in her group fit within the context of the organization as it related to the organization's culture:

It seems that from a micro perspective, people are generally engaged here, but from a macro perspective, it would seem like [the organization has] some issues with engagement, which like I said, is just interesting. That just tells me that people are frustrated. I think people are frustrated with some aspects of the company's culture.

On a very practical level, Cassie, a senior-level division leader, explained that the

employee engagement survey results revealed that “[employees] are frustrated with the merit and pay policies here... not being able to say ‘My good job is worth this much money.’” From a more senior leadership and organizational perspective, Buddy explained that the employee engagement survey results showed him that there was reason for an organizational restructuring. He explained, “The engagement levels of directors was nowhere near where I would have thought it would have been.” This sentiment was echoed by Ren who said, “Well, the group... what we call the director level, these middle-level managers, they were the most disenfranchised, disengaged of any group. They're probably one of the most critical and valuable, and their scores were frankly frightening.”

Confirmed leadership suspicions. When asked how the data confirmed their suspicions about what was happening within the organization, Tom shared:

Probably what I expected... some of the things, from a corporate strategy standpoint at the time, were not clearly communicated [to employees], and I agreed with this. I think from a corporate objective position, I don't think we have a clear line of sight with regard to what the future is, which direction we're going. I agreed with most of it.

This was echoed by Hanna who stated, “There's always going to be an improvement area. I will tell you the one thing that pops up, it doesn't matter what company I've been in, is we need better communication.”

For Buddy, the employee engagement survey results confirmed a need for a change in the organizational structure. He explained, “We knew that there was disgruntlement.” He further shared, “Right after the employee engagement survey was done and the results reviewed, within two months, a huge layer of senior management was restructured out of the organization.” This sentiment on the need to restructure also resonated with Ren, who stated: “I think the results of the survey in February reinforced some of the changes and some of the... what we called NPI transformations, some of the changes we were making.”

He further explained how the employee engagement survey results confirmed his suspicions and those of other senior leaders:

I think that some of the changes we were making is because, frankly, we probably knew how that survey was turning out. In the military sense, at the sergeant level, the people who are actually doing the work and have people working for them, they feel very pulled and stressed, and overloaded, to the point that they don't believe the upper management knew day to day what was going on. There was such a disconnect between what upper management's expectations were and what should be done versus what they're feeling.

As a result of the employee engagement survey results, Ren shared, “In fact, it may have really reinforced it because of the degree of negativity; as such, [the survey] confirmed it and accelerated [the decision to restructure].”

Connie explained that, from an HR perspective, some of the data confirmed her suspicions that had been evident in employee morale and exit interviews. She shared, “Based on exit interviews and overall morale, we sensed that and the survey did provide results to solidify what we felt.” This allowed them to be comfortable in the decision they were making about restructuring the organization at the top.

By contrast, the employee engagement survey results also revealed positive information that confirmed leader suspicions. Urmgard explained:

I was pleased to see that I got a 100% on what it is they need to do. They're happy, they feel like they can [talk with me]... as a manager, it was very good feedback for me and my leadership style. I took that away. It confirmed what I thought was happening... I have worked hard to make sure that the objectives are clear and measured and visible, monthly, and of course, corrected where needed, so I was happy to see that positive feedback.

Surprised leadership. The extent of the need to restructure the organization was a surprise among several of the leaders. Connie, from an HR perspective, explained she was surprised that the “directors' scores were, in terms of feeling connected to [the organization] and its strategy, a little bit lower than you would expect for a director level.” Buddy repeated this sentiment by stating:

I think the most recent survey that we did really caught the attention of our very most senior leadership, our Chief Executive Officer [CEO], especially our CEO, and the rest of the executive team, myself, the Chief Financial Officer. We were a little bit backed on our heels on the overall results, in terms of engagement, in a very important segment of the workforce, and that's the people in the director level of the organization. It was nowhere near where I would have thought it would have been.

He went on to say, “[The directors] are leaders in their own rights, maybe senior leadership, and it was not really good scores. Pretty sobering, quite frankly.” Ren shared similar surprise with the data results for employees at the director level: “It showed it’s maybe even more dire than expected.” He explained, “What surprised me most was the magnitude of the dissatisfaction. That surprised me the most.” Tom’s surprise came from the perception of leadership styles within the organization. He asked, “Why aren't we all following the same management methodology and the communications and engagement processes?”

Cassie offered a different perspective on the employee engagement survey results and whether or not it surprised her. She shared:

No. The reason [the employee engagement survey results] didn’t surprise me is because of the type of organization we are [made up of acquisitions]... the people that are there after the acquisition when someone puts a poster on the wall that has employee value up there, and then the next day gets told that 25 people are going to lose their job. We [the leaders] are the people who see it upfront and personal.

Most useful. Employee engagement survey results proved to be useful for the leaders on several levels. This was brought out when they shared their thoughts on how the survey results showed value to them in their individual role or when considering the organization as a whole in their decision-making.

Connie stated the importance of employee engagement survey results for segmentation and leader ownership:

The ability to segment [results] by business unit or business leader is extremely important.... The data [results] help us to get that ownership down in the organization a little bit lower... it allows us to, when we're talking with a leader, it allows them to own

it. It allows us as HR business partners to own it. This is the data pertaining to our [part of the] organization.

Hanna felt similarly about the usefulness of employee engagement survey results, saying, “The results will provide us with being able to isolate those areas that are either doing very well or isolate areas that maybe have some really key opportunities.” Ren seemed to concur with Connie and Hanna’s opinion when he shared the importance of comparing employee engagement survey results: “I believe the paired comparison between different groups and different sites [is useful], to see if there's something going on differently between the two.”

For Tom, employee engagement survey results proved useful in that the processes instituted within his group seemed to be working. He stated, “Within my business unit, I saw the more positive results that we had based upon some of the things that we've instituted in the last couple of years.” Urmgard saw the results in a similar way to Tom. She stated, “Like I said, it was good to have the confirmation [from her team on her leadership].” She also liked some of the changes she was seeing as a result of the survey. For example, she shared, “I like some of the things [all hands meetings] that are starting to happen so that people can feel the company's identity.” Cassie seemed to share the same view as Tom and Urmgard in seeing the results as confirmation that her leadership decisions were moving her team in the right direction:

I was thrilled... okay, that one went up, that one. Those were my earmarks of how those programs are working. It made me feel like I had a handle on the organization and that my managers, directors, people that report to me, they have a handle on their organization and that they're doing a good job sheltering their employees from things that would create less engagement... I actually do like sitting down looking at the results. I like reading the comments, because it does give me an idea of some things... what's within my control and what's not.

Conversely, Buddy focused less on how the results impact his leadership, but saw employee engagement survey results as a good overall measurement of the organization. He shared this: “I think it’s valuable; it's a barometer, okay? It gives us a sense of the mood, and the

temperament of the organization. What level their appetite is for taking on additional tasks, responsibilities, and duties.” Ren, a senior leader, shared a similar view to Buddy from a senior leadership perspective when he stated, “The survey is a way of asking, are we making progress or not?” He also used it as a predictive tool to understand the pulse of the organization: “Does it come out the way I would have predicted based on the actions [decisions] we’re taking?”

Leadership frustrations. When considering employee engagement survey results, leaders offered several frustrations with the results or how to address the results within the context of the organization. Connie offered this thought into leader frustrations: “It's not going to be a flip of a switch in order to move the needle... I think we struggle, however, with how to really make meaningful improvement. I think we're a little stuck.” Hanna shared similar views:

I guess what would be frustrating is, again, it's trying to move that needle. I'm impatient. I want to see things get better, especially when I feel like we've got the resources and with all the mindsets, the motivation to do it and maybe you just can't identify exactly what's maybe getting in your way.

Conversely, when it comes to resources, Tom explained, “I think that not having the tools in place to do their jobs adequately is probably something that I was a little frustrated with because I thought we worked harder on that.” A slightly different frustration with moving the needle was provided by Cassie when she stated, “I think the thing that frustrates me based on the results is... there’s a dividing line between us, things I can change [as a leader] and the things that I can’t.” When it comes to employee frustration expressed in the survey, she went on to say, “Employees are valuable, we should address the issues that frustrate them somehow.”

Buddy, from a senior leadership perspective, shared his frustration and tension with the results in what leaders can and cannot control when it comes to moving the needle in all areas, such as employee development:

I also get frustrated a bit with the data results, and then trying to respond to it, in that people think that the company has to come knocking on your work station, or your office, and take you by the hand and develop you, as opposed to you taking responsibility for your own development.

Theme 3 was helpful in highlighting how much the leaders knew about the survey results.

In asking what the leaders learned and found useful, surprising, or frustrating, as well as what confirmed their suspicions about the survey results, their answers showed what types of tactical decisions the leaders made, such as increased communication and better promotion of the rewards and recognition programs. It also revealed strategic decisions, such as restructuring part of the organization. The researcher was able to see a link between employee engagement survey results and leadership decisions. Ultimately, it showed the researcher that the results mattered to the leaders and were factored into their decisions.

Theme 4. It's more than a paycheck. To get a more robust understanding of how leaders viewed the concept of employee engagement, its relevance within the organization, the value they placed on engaged employees, and how this might impact their decisions, the researcher asked the question: *How would you define/describe employee engagement?* This provided a glimpse into the leaders' understanding of engagement and how this might influence their decisions. When asked to provide a definition or description of employee engagement, Connie stated:

It's about passion... getting up in the morning and just feeling energized about coming to work... it's idea generation. It's creativity. It's going beyond what the intended goal is and reaching for even more than just the minimal goal... producing something that you can be proud of [and being able to say]... it felt good.

Hanna offered a similar explanation and description on engagement: "To me, engagement evokes emotion. I feel passionate, I'm connected emotionally in this relationship whether it be with a team, with a supervisor, with a company." Buddy also used the word passion in his

definition: “Engagement, to me, means a level of passion... and productivity that an individual employs in the execution of their responsibility.” From a personal perspective, Buddy offered this example of being engaged:

I have a fever, and a commitment to my position, that I would classify myself as fully engaged in my role, in wanting to do my job to the best of my ability, for the benefit of work, and shareholders, and my team. I'm in a senior leadership position. I feel that I'm always looking to not take a shortcut, or do things to the best of my ability with my experience and with my talents, in the company.

Urmgard believed that engagement is more than just a paycheck:

Engagement means you're invested in the success of the organization beyond just the immediate needs that it brings to you. It's more than just a paycheck so an engaged employee is not just here to collect a paycheck. There's something more that they're either getting from or trying to give to.

Ren had a similar view to Buddy and Urmgard: “It means that... someone wakes up, they know what they're responsible for, and what their measures to be successful are, and that they're excited about doing that.”

Ren and Urmgard offered a slightly different perspective into engagement in that they felt the responsibility to be engaged falls on both the employee and the employer. Ren shared, "I think if you really want to be successful, [engagement] has to be shared by both [employee and employer]." In relation to an employee's engagement, he explained, "Your happiness and your promotion and your career, that is your responsibility. Your career is your responsibility." He explained it's not only the responsibility of the employer, but also the employee, emphasizing, “It's both.” Urmgard offered a similar explanation, saying “there's some ownership there [by the employee]... they're investing in owning their ability to be successful.... I think that people... have to learn to be accountable for their choices, their attitudes, their actions.”

Conversely, Hanna indicated that engagement falls to the manager. She stated, “We believe engagement comes through the managers and the employees in their day-to-day

connecting, right?" Hanna also offered this understanding of an engaged employee: "An engaged employee [thinks]... 'If another job comes along with maybe the same or more money, I'm going to think twice about leaving something that I am so loyal and connected to.'" Cassie shared these examples of what engagement looks like:

[Engagement] means that when I walk into a meeting room and there's a group of people in there and that everyone is engaged in the same conversation. That they're not looking at their laptops, they're not looking at their phones and that's when they're fully engaged. They're trying to move the topic forward. The topic could be, "We should outsource this product and make it somewhere else"; or the topic could be, "We need more information" related to something. When I see engaged people, they're really focused on the thing at hand and moving it forward to where it needs to be.

Tom shared an example of what engagement looks like for him as a leader when working with his team:

It could be from a personal level. It could be on a professional level. It's communication... understanding what the employees are going through is very important. Engaging with them in one-on-one meetings every week... I step in and out of the daily activities that the managers do, meaning I don't micromanage them. I allow them to do... I engage as needed.

Ren used the word *energized* to describe engagement. He felt having engaged employees can be a win-win for the employee and the employer. He shared, "I want energized [engaged] employees that are happy. Well, it's good that they're happy, but they're also much more productive, and get a lot more done if they're energized [engaged] and happy. So it's equally beneficial." Buddy offered the challenges he faces with trying to increase employee engagement and move the needle based on the results:

It would be nice to be able to take an extrinsic kind of intervention, and increase everybody's pay by 3%, or put a wellness benefit in, or put an onsite gymnasium, or an onsite daycare, or free coffee. That would be easy, but that's not it... I know without a shadow of a doubt, that's not how you get to a level of employee engagement.

He further explained the shades and nuances of creating and fostering an engaged workforce:

It's a much more-subtle, nuanced equation, where you need to try to make the work and

the position interesting. You've got to try to make it relevant. You got to try to set a work environment, and a work tone among the supervisory aspect of it, whereby people rally around a cause, and they feel that what they're doing has meaning, and value, and the employee feels that they are kind of growing in the position, not just from a skill standpoint, but from developing an overall skillset. That's the tough part of the engagement code that you need to crack.

Ultimately, Buddy explained that engagement boils down to this: "It's really caring about the job you do, and how you do it."

The leaders' answers from Theme 4 were helpful because they allowed the researcher to listen to the leaders' personal definition of employee engagement and also hear examples of what engagement looked and felt like. The leaders used words such as *passion* and *energy* when describing engagement. Their answers also showed contrasts in the opinions held by individual leaders regarding who was responsible for being engaged—the employee or the employer. Some leaders felt it was the manager's responsibility, others the employee's, and still others that it was a shared responsibility held by the employee and the manager. Some leaders also provided examples of what an engaged employee looks like. From a research perspective, all of these views, examples, and definitions on engagement impact leaders' decisions when they are considering employee engagement survey results.

Theme 5. Did you hear me? Who's listening? Now what? When leaders were asked about employees' perception of the engagement survey, they provided critical information that helped the researcher learn more about how employees viewed the survey process. This information can also provide a hint as to how the leaders' perceptions of their employees' results influenced their decisions.

Connie explained, "I think it varies... some people... see it as a good opportunity to give feedback. Others don't take the time to take it." Hanna offered a similar sentiment in that employees may feel apathetic about taking the survey. She stated, "Well, I've done this in the past

and you didn't do anything," or "What you did, really didn't make a difference to me, so I don't know if I'm going to take the time to do it." Cassie shared that some employees may feel like, "Stop bugging me about doing it."

It is important to note that leaders shared a common perception that employees feared the survey could be traced back to them somehow. Because of this, employees may have held back their true feelings for fear of retaliation or being viewed as negative if the results could be traced back to them. Leadership insights on this phenomenon are shared next.

Connie offered, "There are pockets of people who may have some fear about what's going to be done with the data... 'Is it confidential'... 'Can this be traceable?'" Hanna shared what she feels employees are thinking regarding confidentiality: "We've all used the same process, but there are the skeptics that say, 'You say it's anonymous but is it really?'" Buddy shared, "We stress the anonymity of it. There's still conspiracy people out there that think... [it's not confidential]."

Urmgard provided more insight into the depth of this phenomenon on confidentiality and anonymity and how this fear impacts the survey results:

I honestly don't think people believed when they said it would all be anonymous, so I think that there's an element of "It's reflective of the truth [in the data]," but there's probably things that were held back. Because I know when I took at it, there were a couple of questions that I opted to take the neutral stance rather than a negative stance.

She further explained that, in the back of an employee's minds, they might be thinking: "Just the thought that [they know it's me], just the repercussion or getting labeled in such a way."

Tom's comments offered a different perspective on survey confidentiality. He felt because of the relationship he has built with his team, some employees in his group didn't seem to worry whether their comments could be traced back to them. He explained:

I had more than a few of them say, "Within the survey, I'm going to express my

frustration in the lack of focus, for example, or the lack of strategy we feel we have at [the organization].” I said to the employees prior to taking the survey, “This is your opportunity to [fix the problem].”

Cassie offered another perception that employees are really interested to know if their leaders heard them through their survey results, and if they did listen, then what are the leaders going to do about it? She explained:

What would be interesting for employees to hear is how we, as their managers, interpreted their answers in the survey. What they’re really interested in is how the company interpreted all the results of the survey. Did the company [leaders] hear us?

She also shared that employees may be looking for a sense of collective voice in the results:

Do I feel the same way as a lot of other people?... As far as the survey... [employees are wondering], “Does the company hear me, and do I feel that what I’m saying is not just limited to me, that it’s across the company? Did 1,500 other people say this merit process thing just really frustrates the heck out of me, or you know, if there are acquisitions, why are we firing people or why are we outsourcing jobs?” This is when things sort of start to fall apart, probably in their minds.

The surveys are conducted approximately every 18 months. Based on the discussion the researcher had with the leaders, it appeared that the leaders placed a high value on the employee survey results, as reflected in the first four themes. What was unclear was if the leaders were aware of the value that employees placed on the survey results. By getting a better understanding of the perception the employees held of the survey, through the eyes of the leader, the researcher gained a greater depth of information about how the survey was used to make decisions.

Overall, the leaders indicated that employees had mixed feelings about taking the survey. This included employees not feeling their voice mattered because, based on the employees’ experience, nothing had been done in the past and they questioned why they should take it seriously and put much effort into doing the survey again. Leaders also verbalized the concerns that some employees have surrounding the survey results. Specifically, employees were concerned that the survey was not anonymous or confidential and that it would be traced back to

or reflect negatively on them. Others encouraged their employees to take the survey as an opportunity to be heard, which resulted in some employees actually expressing to managers that they were going to give details on how they felt about a work role or process.

These perceptions held by leaders of employees who took the survey seemed to be well-rounded and based on what they knew of their employees, what decisions had been made by the leaders based on past survey results, and the common fears held by some that their answers could be traced back to them. This perceived knowledge about a leader's direct reports helped the researcher understand how the leader might synthesize these feelings as they viewed the engagement survey results and made decisions on the most recent results.

Theme 6. Moving the needle: Quick wins and strategic decisions. Based on thorough analysis of the data by the researcher, leaders used employee engagement survey results in a manner that led to two forms of decision making: (a) tactical decisions, or the often visible decisions that leaders made to provide quick wins for employees; and (b) strategic decisions, or the organizational decisions directed at moving the organization forward toward long-term success. These two forms of decision-making will be outlined next based on specific leader comments and then discussed in the findings section of this chapter and in more detail in Chapter 5. Regarding leadership decisions, Urmgard shared, “Let's just say the engagement survey... planted the seeds for some ideas.” What follows are the ideas that were identified and the leadership decisions that were made.

Tactical decision: Quick wins. A common tactical decision made by the leaders after reviewing the survey results was to increase communication. Increasing communication was considered to be a quick win (a decision made by the leaders directly related to the survey results) for the employees and the leaders. Hanna and Ren described quick wins as the “low-

hanging fruit.” Hanna further explained the low-hanging fruit to be “things that [they] could impact... the things that really topped out [in the data results], and what [they are] taking action on right now to start to work on... the opportunity areas to help [their] employees become more fully engaged.” The following are some examples of tactical decisions that the leaders made related to increased communication.

From an HR perspective, Hanna felt a quick win would come in the form of increased communication “creating really very dynamic and effective communication loops where [they] are constantly getting feedback.” Additionally, she said, “More touch points with our employees is one area we’re starting to increase... our next plan is to do a focus group.”

Upon reviewing the results, Connie also saw a way to get a quick win for employees by increasing employee communication. She offered this insight into her decision to increase communication surrounding employee development:

One of the points of feedback where we scored lower was that there's a feeling or perception that the company does not value employee development. I try to think about, “Okay, how can we promote what we're [already] doing [surrounding employee development]?” That's how it affects my decisions in terms of writing communications.”

She explained that they do offer employee development, but some employees are not aware of it, so she thought, “How do I really emphasize and try to get across what we are doing?” That's how it affects my decisions in terms of communications.” Tom also made decisions to increase communication within his division. He explained:

We instituted more communication meetings for top issues with all the players.... A lot of things we instituted, [such as] doing kaizens, came out of that [data] and those types of things as well. We looked at out of the box quality issues and an immediate communication path.

Ren described that the leaders began to increase communication based on the survey results. He shared, “An example [that] I think is positive is that we [the leaders] had started

putting in this discussion about prioritizing projects and making sure people [are heard].” He further explained, “At the senior level, at the VP level, let’s say general managers and VPs and HR, what are the biggest items we want to address... and then pick two or three areas [based on the results] to work on.” At the divisional level, leaders made communication-related decisions as well. Ren explained, “We [the senior leaders] instituted, at the semiconductor level, town hall meetings once a month to try to increase communication.” He further explained a tactical decision he made with his direct reports:

Along those lines [of communication], I had an offsite with my staff on Monday and Tuesday... I think we have a lot of potential, and I think the changes we've made are very positive, but I want to take that to the next level.

Cassie explained that her manner of increased communication came in the form of making the tactical decision to support her teams by attending meetings and lending her voice. By making the decision to lend her senior-level influence to assist her team, members were able to move the needle forward on a particular project or topic and cut through the red tape.

She explained the following scenario and her reason behind her decision to attend these meetings in this way:

Yeah, so the thing that formed in my mind was that my employees are seeing frustration from the lack of engagement across functions. In that particular situation, I inserted myself, and I inserted some of their managers in meetings they might not have been attending, or I wasn’t attending, where there were trouble spots, or more contention.... [The decision to have leadership attend] just added more calmness, common sense capabilities to move a conversation forward, capability to decide when to give up on the battle, and when to go back another day or take the topics apart, and things like that. That was one [decision she made from the employee engagement survey results].

Cassie further explained the impact this quick win had on her employees:

They feel supported. I have had employees that were very highly frustrated and just having someone like myself in the room to either back them up or help people out of the confusing conversation [and] make a decision. They felt it took the temperature down in the room for them.

Because the employee engagement survey results revealed training to be important to her team, a quick win for Urmgard might come in the form of creating a training matrix. She explained, “I’m thinking that I want to put together a training matrix. I think just an annual training on certain skillsets within my organization.”

Hanna gave a specific example of how the employee engagement survey results were able to assist in making a tactical decision and a quick win for a couple of leaders in her business unit by providing manager mentorship:

I had a supervisor who was having some challenges, and his team, the feedback was that he maybe wasn't as connected as he needed to be. In that same organization, I had just the opposite. I had a leader who was very engaged and connected to their team... I hooked those two up and I said, “Talk to each other.” Again, it was nice to be able to utilize the data in that way.

Hanna also provided this specific example of a tactical decision she made surrounding promoting a rewards and recognition program with a leader who was not previously aware of it: “One of the things that came up [in the results] was how employees feel. They don't feel that they get sufficiently rewarded for their efforts.” She explained that the organization has a formal rewards and recognition program, but not enough leaders and employees are aware of the program:

We have a formalized recognition program; we just need to communicate that we have it... it's very easy to implement and to me, that's a quick win. Let's use the program. You don't have to reinvent the wheel, just use it.

It was interesting to note that Tom mentioned the rewards and recognition program during his interview. He shared how he had recently decided to use the reward program for the employees in his business unit:

Taking advantage on numerous occasions of using the reward system that we have here... I actually did one at the town hall meeting for an outstanding employee that I have who actually took it upon himself to really, really solve an issue for one of our biggest customers.... He got an award, a cash award as well as a physical reward, or I should say

a material reward.... It's not so much the money. It's just to get recognized, especially in the service industry.

Strategic decisions: Long-term wins. The employee engagement survey results that revealed some major and minor organizational decisions also provided significant insight for the leaders. A strategic decision the senior leaders made after they reviewed the employee engagement survey results was to put in place a large-scale organizational restructuring. Based on the comments from the leaders during the semi-structured interviews, the results confirmed their suspicions regarding the need for a sweeping organizational change as discussed in Theme 3. The results accelerated the timing of the change.

Buddy also shared how the employee engagement survey results helped to inform the senior leaders in making a strategic organizational decision surrounding the restructuring:

We did this survey in February, and at the time, we had been making plans from early autumn from HR to [restructure the organization]. At the time we were thinking of the restructuring we thought, let's get through the holidays, and let people get back to work in February. In the course of launching that survey, making plans, and getting people prepped to take the survey... at the senior leadership level, we decided we were going to do a major restructuring with the concentration of that restructuring being at the top.

Based on the survey results, the senior leadership made these strategic organizational restructuring decisions:

The Chief Operation Officer was gone, the head of quality was gone, one or two of the general managers of our biggest units was gone, the heads of life sciences, services, engineering, and operations were gone. We took out so much of the top, and really streamlined the organization, and made a much more-simple organization, we got rid of all these project teams and meetings.

As a result of this strategic decision, Buddy shared, "We're a different company than we were at the beginning of the calendar year." To measure the impact of this strategic decision, he decided to conduct a pulse survey. He explained, "We're going to do a follow-up [survey] in September. It's going to be a modified version of what we did, just to get a pulse beat."

Ren, a senior leader in the organization, also shared in his interview that the employee engagement survey results influenced the senior leaders to make strategic decisions for restructuring the organization:

In March, what we decided was to restructure the organization... But as our survey results—I don't know if you've seen our survey results before doing the questioning—point out, our intention to restructure the organization was correct... we still have a lot more of walking the talk and proving it. Now, our surveys were done in February, before these changes I talked about in March, and before some of the changes we put in place about prioritizing projects and allocating people's time... we formed teams on corrective actions, put the prioritization in place, made our processes a little leaner.

Ren explained another way he used the employee engagement survey results to help him make strategic organizational decisions. He stated, “We do comparisons. How did this site compare to another site? in the responses. How does engineering compare to other functions?”

Tom gave his perspective from a director level on the organizational decisions that were made at the senior leadership level:

There were a lot of changes that were made on March 31st within [the organization].... Because the survey results were not very positive [related to the directors], I don't know if that was the driving factor in making the change, but the executive staff change was something that came out of that.

When it came to strategic decisions within his own unit, Tom shared, “It's kind of two steps. We review this, calibrate it, realign it with the current objectives for the fiscal year, and then, moving forward, how we can enhance that based on some of this?”

When considering the various decisions that were made by the leaders based on the employee engagement survey results, it was evident that the decisions fell within two major areas—tactical decisions and strategic decisions. Tactical decisions were often more likely to be made by mid-level managers who wanted to make decisions that provided immediate impact on their group or team within the organization. These decisions could be visible corporate-wide decisions, such as increasing the frequency and communication surrounding town hall meetings,

to inserting themselves into meetings to help move a stalled project along. These visible decisions showed leaders had “heard” employees’ voices through the survey results and were listening to and acting on those results. Conversely, strategic decisions based on the results were more likely to be made by the senior-level leaders. These decisions tended to be more organizational in nature. Although these decisions, such as the reorganization or the increased communication at town hall meetings, were made based on the survey results, the leaders were more concerned with the impact of their decisions on the organization as a whole than they were on the individual employees. This allowed them to make decisions to let employees go or outsource the hiring of employees to low-cost countries because it was a better long-term strategic financial move for the organization or for other reasons not revealed. This showed the type of decisions that were made and whether the outcome of those decisions was viewed through the lens of the employee or the organization.

Theme 7. Leaders: Choosing not to act on survey results. The researcher asked the leaders if there were times when they did not act on the employee engagement survey results. What follows are the comments that leaders provided in their interviews that gave the researcher a glimpse into situations when they did not act on the employee engagement survey results.

Connie explained that leaders may decide not to act on employee engagement survey results when “it’s not a representation of the whole [global] company.” It is important to note again that the organization is a global organization, and making a decision based on comments from employees in the United States may not be in the best interest of employees in Asia. Therefore, she explained how keeping a global perspective in decision-making is critical to the overall success of the organization and the employees throughout the world.

Tom explained times when leaders may not make a decision based on the employee

engagement survey results:

What I was going to say is, if I didn't, or my team didn't act upon [results], we would prioritize the negative, or the things we needed the most that would move the needle the quickest in the most positive way is probably a better way of saying it.

He further explained, "I don't want to say it's noise, but it's noise. I'm a big advocate of, 'Let's hit the top 80th percentile.' We're never going to fix the other 20 and that's what we do."

Tom also thought it was important to weigh the impact a decision would have on all of the employees and the organization:

I think understanding what the value of each issue is, depending on what we do, that's something that has to be taken into account as well. You cannot peanut butter a process across the globe just because of cultural differences, business methodologies, and those types of things... the value of the decision needs to be weighed. Sometimes the best decision is deciding not to act on that result at this time.

Urmgard explained that she did not act on results when the survey results were positive or when she had no ability to influence the decisions that needed to be made because of her title [director]. She shared, "No, [I didn't make a decision] because, like I said, the scoring that's related to me and how I manage were very positive, so that just means [I should] keep doing what I'm doing." She also does not make decisions because of a limited sphere of influence, that "there are some things that are outside my influence" to change.

Sometimes organizational bureaucracy gets in the way of decision-making based on employee engagement survey results. Cassie, a senior-level leader, explained:

I have not been able to act on the results of explaining to my peers [other senior leaders] ... the impact of the core values, specifically the one related to employee value, and in light of being an acquisition company and how that is being perceived very, very negatively. I've not been able to do anything about that. Well, I've argued the point a number of times with my peers, in the room with my peers and on the topic. I've not been able to move that needle.

Organizational efficiency and the bottom line influenced Ren:

In most employee engagement survey results, people are concerned about compensation.

I wouldn't necessarily react to compensation-based results on surveys. If it's a particular group, it is different. I will pay attention to make sure they are being paid competitively compared to the market... but HR does a good job of making sure that groups compensation is in line with the market, and we make changes when needed.

Ren offered another example of not making a decision based on a survey due to organizational efficiency and the bottom line:

We have a goal for outsourcing employees... approximately 25% of our engineers were actually outsourced... to low-cost countries... some of that is possibly interpreted by employees of the company as "not investing in employees." It's not that I'm just trying to save money, I'm just trying to be more efficient. I'll continue to explain it every opportunity I get, but I'm not going to change it based on a survey.

Conversely, Hanna felt the leaders do act on employee engagement survey results. She explained, "It's more, 'Are we connecting the dots?'" Because again, we do these surveys with the intention of doing something with them, and I would say we have."

Although not acting on the results is still a decision by the leaders, the researcher wanted to understand why a leader may choose not to act on the results, as this would give insight into their decision-making process. There were situations when a tension existed between a leader's desire to act on the results and being able to do so. Not acting on results seemed to fall into three areas: (a) the inability to act on the results because it was outside of that leader's sphere of influence or capacity to influence change, (b) the hindrance of organizational bureaucracy, and (c) the accountability to the bottom line.

Themes 1 to 7 proved to be of great significance. These themes offered the researcher a glimpse into the organization's culture, the impact that the acquisitions had on organizational identity, and how this disjointed environment impacted the leaders' and the employees' day-to-day activities. It also helped the researcher's understanding of what new leadership knowledge was gained or what suspicions were confirmed through the employee engagement survey results and how the leaders defined and described employee engagement, as well as their perceptions of

how employees viewed the engagement survey. The information gained through the semi-structured interview questions that produced these themes laid the foundation for answering the central question: *How do business leaders use employee engagement survey results to make decisions?* Without such a comprehensive understanding of the organization and leadership perceptions, it would have been difficult to fully understand the lens through which leadership decisions were made when viewing the survey results. The research questions will be analyzed next as viewed through the purpose of the study and the theoretical framework.

Analysis of Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain a greater understanding of how business leaders use employee engagement survey results to make decisions within their organization. The normative decision model (Vroom & Yetton, 1973) was chosen as the theoretical framework because it allowed the researcher to gain a greater understanding of how business leaders used employee engagement survey results as the voice of the employee when making decisions and addressing the central question. The alignment of the study's purpose, theoretical framework, and central question are highlighted in Table 4.3.

To answer the central question, the researcher asked subject questions as outlined in Chapter 3 that provided a more comprehensive understanding of how the leaders used employee engagement survey results as the voice of the employee to make decisions. Rubin and Rubin (2012) explain that "responsive interviews are built around main questions, follow-up questions, and probes that together elicit the rich data that speak to your research question" (p. 116). As discussed in Chapter 3, the answers to these subject questions provided a more comprehensive picture surrounding the decision-making process of the leaders.

The data analysis, which consisted of first- and second-level coding, resulted in the

Table 4.3

Research Design Alignment

Purpose of Study	Theoretical Framework	Research Question
The purpose of this study was to discover how an organization used employee engagement survey data to understand their employees and make decisions about their organization.	The normative decision model seeks to understand and clarify the decision-making process of leaders (Hughes et al., 2009; Yukl, 2013; Vroom & Yetton, 1973).	How do business leaders use employee engagement survey data to make decisions?

identification of seven themes identified and discussed earlier in this chapter. A summary of the evidence of these themes as found in the leaders' comments is outlined in Table 4.4.

Summary

Based on an analysis of the leaders' responses to the semi-structured interview questions, several implications for practice were identified. For example, employee engagement survey results influenced the leaders to make two forms of decisions: (a) tactical decisions, or the often visible decisions that leaders made that led to quick wins for the employees; and (b) strategic decisions, or the organizational decisions made by the leaders with the goal of long-term organizational success. Strategic and tactical decisions that impact the bottom line begins by understanding the voice of the employee through the employee engagement survey results. Tactical decisions included creating more frequent and dynamic communications that allowed for feedback loops in areas such as employee development and reward and recognitions programs. Increased communication among leaders also occurred, as well as some leaders making the decision to physically insert themselves into meetings and situations to influence change on a process or procedure and move a conversation forward when it was stalled. This type of decision gave a quick win for their team or business unit. This tactic is in line with Wells and Bravender's (2016) recent study; they explained that "leaders recognized that increasing engagement was critical to improving revenue cycle performance" (p. 36). Effort should be made

Table 4.4

Evidence and Summary of Themes

	Themes	Evidence
1	Culture: Big Company with a Start-Up Feel	"It's a unique culture... the organization ...is basically made up of acquisitions... it's like a blended family, right?" (Cassie)
2	Identity Crisis: Who are We?	"The number one challenge that I've seen and this was very much represented in our [survey] data, is that people struggle with an identity." (Hanna)
3	Data Points: Leadership Insights	"Well, the group... what we called the director level, these middle level managers, they were the most disenfranchised, disengaged of any group. They're probably one of the most critical and valuable, and their scores were frankly frightening." (Ren)
4	Engagement: It's More Than a Paycheck	"It's about passion... getting up in the morning and just feeling energized about coming to work." (Connie)
5	The Results: Did You Hear Me? Who's Listening? Now What?	"I think it varies... some people... see it as a good opportunity to give feedback. Others don't take the time to take it..." "There are pockets of people who may have some fear about what's going to be done with the data.... Is it confidential?... Can this be traceable?" (Connie)
6	Moving the Needle: Quick Wins and Strategic Decisions	"Does the company hear me, and do I feel that what I'm saying not just limited to me is that it's across the company?" (Cassie)
7	Leaders: Choosing Not to Act on Survey Results	"Low-hanging fruit" "Things that [we] could impact... the things that really topped out [in the data results], and what we're taking action on right now to start to work on... the opportunity, areas to help our employees become more fully engaged." (Hanna and Ren)
		"It's not a representation of the whole [global] company." (Connie)

at both the organizational and business unit levels to implement leadership initiatives to improve the organization and make decisions accordingly.

At a global level, the employee engagement survey results served to confirm leader suspicions and surprise leaders. The leaders interviewed were aware of the importance of measuring employee engagement and also had a firm grasp on the perceptions that employees had toward the survey. This was in line with Sugheir et al.'s (2011) study. Based on the survey results, senior leaders made the decision to remove a specific segment of the leadership due to

the negative impact this group was having on those who reported to them. Measuring and acting on the results when they were able appeared to be important to the leaders, which is in contrast to some of the current literature (Sugheir et al., 2011).

Both tactical and strategic decisions were made by the leaders due to the employee engagement survey results. HR data analytics is becoming increasingly important within organizations (Kappor & Kabra, 2014). Comprehensive HR analytics can be used by “gleaning insights from the findings to shape decisions for better organizational performance” (p. 50). These analytics should be in line with the organizational strategies and goals (Kappoor & Kabra, 2014) and make HR a strategic and powerful business partner to those using the data to make decisions. Chapter 5 will go into detail surrounding the interpretation of the data, the findings, how these finding compare to current literature, and the implications for practice.

CHAPTER 5—DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate individual experiences of business leaders to better understand how these leaders use employee engagement survey results to make decisions about their organization. The knowledge generated from this study is useful to employee engagement researchers and practitioners, such as HR professionals and business leaders, to provide them insight into how leaders use employee engagement survey results to make decisions.

The participants of this study were mid-level managers, executives, and senior executives from a medium-size global organization with approximately 1,500 employees located in the U.S. The semi-structured interview questions coupled with the leaders' answers provided insight into answering the study's central question: *How do business leaders use employee engagement survey results to make decisions?*

In using in-depth interviewing (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) with business leaders whose organization deployed an employee engagement survey, seven themes were identified from the data (Saldaña, 2013). These seven themes were then summarized and further analyzed by viewing the summary data through the lens of the major research question and theoretical framework. The theme analysis led to a number of findings and implications for practice that will be discussed later in this chapter.

This section will also reflect on the study from a scholar-practitioner (SP) perspective and describe how the research process influenced the researcher's thinking as a change agent in this area of employee engagement survey results to gain a better understanding of leader decisions. This chapter will conclude with suggestions for future research and a chapter summary.

Overview of Findings

The analysis yielded several key findings that will be discussed in this section. What follows is a description of the findings as they intersect with the analysis, the literature, and the theoretical framework. The findings listed below are in no order of importance based on the study analysis.

Finding 1. Leadership Decisions Based on Employee Engagement Survey Results Fell Into Two Categories—Tactical Decisions and Strategic Decisions

Based on the interviews and the comments of the leaders discussed in Chapter 4, when asked to describe employee engagement, it was evident that the leaders understood the importance of acting on the survey results to increase engagement among employees. Leaders should not deploy a survey if they have no intention of acting on the results or this may decrease engagement among workers (Sugheir et al., 2011; Walker, 2012). Furthermore, leaders should have a clear plan surrounding the employee engagement survey that includes survey distribution, analysis, communication, and the leaders' commitment to act on the results prior to deploying the employee engagement survey (Mann, 1957, as cited in Burke, 2011; Rice et al., 2012). If there is no commitment on behalf of the leadership to act on the results, then the survey should not be deployed (Walker, 2012).

When asked during the interview to describe decisions the leader made based on the survey results, an analysis of the leader comments revealed that their decisions fell into two categories—tactical decisions and strategic decisions. Recent trends show that HR professionals and leaders are using HR analytics, including employee engagement survey results, to make decisions (Coco, Jamison, & Black, 2011; Kapoor & Kabra, 2014; Wells & Bravender, 2016). According to Kapoor and Kabra (2014), “HR analytics refers to the integration of relevant HR

data from different sources, the performing of organizational and workforce analysis on this captured data, and ultimately the gleaning of insights from findings to shape decisions for better organizational performance” (p. 50). The type of tactical and strategic decisions identified in this study are as follows.

Tactical decisions. Tactical decisions are those made by the leader that led to *quick wins* for employees in relation to the survey results. Leaders indicated that decisions leading to quick wins were those that positively impacted employee role functionality, processes or procedures, or improvement in the employee/client experience. Hanna and Ren describe quick wins as the “low-hanging fruit.” Hanna further explains the low-hanging fruit to be “things that (we) could impact... the things that really topped out [in the survey results], and what we're taking action on right now to start to work on... the opportunity areas to help our employees become more fully engaged.” Connie, Hanna, and Ren all identified increased communication as a quick win for employees. Per Whitman, Hart, and Caleo (2011), “strong leadership and communication... have been key drivers of improving engagement” (p. 148). These types of decisions made by the leader were most likely to provide a boost to employee engagement, as employees felt they were heard and given a voice by participating in the survey process.

Apart from communication, the tactical decisions made by the leaders were at the micro-level in that they were directed toward a leader’s individual team, group, or business unit. For example, Cassie shared that being an advocate for her team was a decision she made to boost engagement: “In my mind was that my employees [were] seeing frustration from the lack of engagement across functions (business groups). In that situation, I inserted myself, and I inserted some of their managers in meetings that they might not have been attending, or I wasn’t attending, where there were trouble slots, or more contention.” This was a keen example of a

tactical decision to insert herself and her managers into a meeting or project team within her business unit to get a quick win for her employees based on the frustrations vocalized through the survey results.

Strategic decisions. Strategic decisions made by the leaders were calculated and analytical. These decisions seem to be viewed as weightier by the leaders because the decisions seemed to have more impact to the organization's structure or profit margin. These decisions were made with the goal of long-term organizational success, rather than tactical decisions that were focused on quick wins. Buddy, the Senior Vice President of Human Resources, explained that the survey results confirmed a need for a change in the organizational structure. He explained, "Right after the survey was done, within two months, a huge layer of senior management was restructured out of the organization." Because of the survey, Ren shared this about the survey's impact on restructuring: "In fact, [the survey] may have really reinforced [the decision to restructure] because of the degree of negativity... [the survey] confirmed it and accelerated [the decision to restructure]." The decision to restructure the organization and eliminate roles at the top half of the organization was a major strategic decision the senior leadership made based on the survey results. Based on the leader comments shared in Chapter 4, this strategic decision positioned the organization and the employees for greater success long term by eliminating those in certain senior leadership roles who were viewed as out of touch with what was happening below them in the organization.

When considering the normative decision model (Vroom & Yetton, 1973) and the tactical and strategic leadership decisions, leaders were influenced by the input employees provided through the survey results. Surveys provide feedback that can be viewed by those who deploy the survey, and then they can decide if or how they will use that feedback. Tactical or strategic

decisions made because of survey feedback would align with the Autocratic II (AII) variety of decision-making as outlined in Vroom and Yetton's normative decision-making framework. The leadership decisions did not appear to consistently move beyond Autocratic II. Dromey (2014) identified six areas of importance when considering drivers of engagement, and among them was the importance of "employee voice and involvement" (as cited in Purcell, 2014, p. 250) in the staff survey. Dromey explained that there was a strong connection between employee engagement and perception of employee voice from the survey, but leaders often overlook the importance of this phenomenon. Based on the leaders' comments, they seemed to deduce that tactical decisions based on the feedback of the employees through the survey were more likely to lead to quick wins and have the greatest positive impact on employee engagement (Rice et al., 2012; Walker 2013). Based on the work of Sugheir et al. (2011), although there has been an increase in organizations that measure employee engagement, low employee engagement may be the result of a perception held by employees that their opinion does not count because employees do not see decisions being made based on their survey feedback. Sugheir et al. (2011) explain that enhanced engagement is likely to increase when management actions "are clearly observable by employees" (p. 58). This points to the importance of the voice of the employee when given the opportunity to influence leader decisions through engagement survey results.

Finding 2. There Appears to Be a Tension Between a Leader's Desire to Act on the Survey Results and Their Responsibility to Grow the Bottom Line

It was apparent from leader interviews that there is an internal struggle that occurs among leaders as they consider acting on the survey results. Based on their responses to the interview questions, the leaders understood the importance and value of having an engaged workforce (Saks & Gruman, 2011). Their comments also indicated they understood that engagement means

employees are happier in their work role and that this leads to increased productivity and satisfaction among employees in their roles (Harter et al., 2002; Purcell, 2014; Wollard, 2011). Leaders recognized that the organization was better positioned for organizational success with engaged employees (Clifton, 2011; Gable et al., 2010; Macey & Schneider, 2008). The leaders even provided definitions of engagement that often mirrored the literature as they described engaged employees as passionate and fully invested in their work (Harter et al., 2002; Kahn, 1990; Shuck & Wollard, 2010). Many examples of their comments surrounding the importance of employee engagement were provided in Chapter 4.

Though leaders had a thorough understanding of engagement, and a desire to act on the results to meet the needs of the employees, it was also evident from their comments that they experienced a sense of internal angst when faced with certain business decisions viewed through the lens of the survey results. There was an underlying sense that acting on the results was not clear cut, but more complex in nature. Despite wanting to move the needle forward, there were times when they felt they were not able to, at least not in a manner that would directly address the voice of the employee through the engagement survey data. The leaders were responsible to shareholders to make strategic decisions that took into consideration the financial impact of their decisions as perceived by various stakeholders. For example, although the survey results showed that employees thought there was a lack of investment in employees, Ren, a senior-level executive, explained his strategic decision to outsource employees to low-cost countries:

We have a goal for outsourcing employees... approximately 25% of our engineers... to low-cost countries..... [This is] possibly interpreted by employees... as “not investing in employees”.... It’s not that, I’m just trying to save money, I’m just trying to be more efficient. I’ll continue to explain... but I’m not going to change it based on a survey.

In this example, Ren, a senior-level leader, explained how he needed to outsource employees to low-cost countries rather than backfill positions with employees from the U.S. due

to cost containment. He could hire two engineers in low-cost countries compared to one in the U.S. The decision to outsource was more efficient from a workload and financial perspective—twice the work for nearly half the cost when outsourcing to low-cost countries. In this case, Ren felt he was aware of the employees' voices and the perception that some employees held regarding employee investment, but felt significant pressure to make decisions that positively impacted the bottom line by controlling expenses through outsourcing.

This tension led to a leadership paradox. Like a tightrope walker with a balancing pole in hand, on one side of the balancing pole is the human element of employee engagement and the leader's desire to listen and makes decisions based on survey results. On the other side of the balancing pole is the need to increase organizational profit. The tension occurs when trying to balance the human element of engagement with the need to increase capital. There appears to be an internal balancing act going on between the leader's emotions and logic, as the leader considers both the human obligations they feel toward their employees and the financial obligations they have toward the shareholders and stakeholders. Ultimately, in this situation, the leader's balancing pole leaned toward making a strategic decision that was bent toward the financial obligations of the organization despite low employee engagement survey results. Vroom and Yetton's (1973) normative decision model describes this as an Autocratic II (AII), where a leader makes a decision based on the information they gathered from the employees through survey results. Autocratic II means the leader is aware of what the employee thinks about a situation—in this case, through survey feedback—but ultimately the leader will decide, and it may or may not reflect the opinion of the employee.

It is important to note that the normative decision model (Vroom & Yetton, 1973) does not judge the decision of the leader. It is a lens to help explain the variety of decisions that can be

made (i.e., autocratic, consulting, or group) and the procedure for making that decision. Although no judgment is being made on the leaders who participated in this study, recent literature may provide additional insight on the choice of choosing engagement over the voice of the employee. Perhaps it does not have to be an either-or decision. Recent studies have shown the value of listening to employees through survey results and thereby increasing the bottom line. Coco et al. (2011), Wells and Bravender (2016), Wiley (2014) contend that using surveys to increase engagement leads to greater engagement, which is linked to organizational profit.

What is unclear in this situation is if the leaders who chose to focus on profit had instead chosen a more long-term strategic approach—to listen to the voice of the employees—would have seen an increase in morale, less turnover, greater customer satisfaction, and increased organizational profit. For example, rather than outsource employees, what would the result have been if the leaders invested in the employees they currently have by hiring from within or back filling fewer positions? When considering the normative decisions model (Vroom & Yetton, 1973), there may be situations when leaders move beyond autocratic decisions to include consulting with employees through focus groups, one-on-one conversations with employees and line managers, or group decisions that would yield results that both increased engagement and the bottom line. Though this slows down the decision-making process and is not possible in many situations where leaders must make decisions, there might be some situations that warrant consulting and group decisions.

Finding 3. There Seems to Be a Gap Between a Leader's Desire to Act on the Survey Results and Their Ability to Influence Change Due to Their Role, Title, or Globalization

Based on the interviews, it was clear that the leaders were cognizant of the importance of acting on the employee engagement survey results (Rice et al., 2012; Walker, 2012). As

discussed in Chapter 4, they consistently expressed their desire to move the needle and capture the low-hanging fruit to get a quick win for employees and increase employee engagement. During the interviews, leaders expressed their desire to act on the results, yet admitted there were times when they were not able to influence change because the nature of the situation was outside of their sphere of influence or their title or position of power within the organization.

This was evident in several leader comments. For example, Cassie, a senior-level executive, shared her limited influence with other senior-level executives: “Well, I’ve argued the point several times with my peers, on this topic. I’ve not been able to move that needle.” She further explained: “I think the thing that frustrates me based on the results is... there’s a dividing line between us, things I can change and the things that I can’t.” Urmgard shared that despite wanting to act on the results, from where she sits in the organization (title/power to make change), she feels her decisions are limited: “There are some things that are outside my influence” to change. Despite her desire to act on the results as a leader (Rice et al., 2012; Walker, 2012) on behalf of employees, she was unable to move the discussion forward, and she found this a source of frustration and an internal conflict with her desire to influence change. Connie offered this insight into leader frustrations about the difficulty in influencing change: “It’s not going to be a flip of a switch to move the needle... I think we struggle, however, with how to really make meaningful improvement. I think we’re a little stuck.” Mann (1957) stated, “He noted that when a manager was given the survey results, any resulting improvement depended on what the manager did with the information” (as cited in Purcell, 2014, p. 39). If the employees perceive that the manager did nothing with the survey results, nothing is accomplished except perhaps frustration on behalf of the employee who provided input that it seemingly did not matter. Based on the comments of the leaders, they wanted to make decisions that resulted in

positive change, but felt they could not or were limited to do so. Whether the leader can make decisions based on the survey results or not, it is critical that management have a systematic approach to discussing the results with employees (Mann, 1957, as cited in Purcell, 2014; Rice et al., 2012; Walker, 2012) and to explaining their decisions.

Globalization also limited the leaders' ability to make decisions based on the survey results. Leaders were hesitant to make decisions in the U.S. that might negatively impact employees in other countries. There is a difference in what drives employee engagement across countries (Wiley, 2014). For example, what drives employees to be more fully engaged in the U.S. may not be the same for workers in the Netherlands or in China. It is important for leaders in global organizations to understand this when viewing employee engagement survey results.

Tom explained the impact of globalization on his leadership decisions: "You cannot peanut butter a process across the globe just because of cultural differences... the value of the decision needs to be weighed. Sometimes the best decision is deciding not to act on that result at this time." Not only does the culture of the organization need to be considered, but so does the national culture of where the employee lives (Wiley, 2014). When considering Vroom and Yetton's (1973) normative decision model, the decisions surrounding globalization fell within the AII variety of decision-making. The leaders considered the voice of the employee through the survey results, but did so with a global perspective. This meant that there were times when a decision was not made because it was not in the best interest of all employees. Where leaders may have an opportunity to expand the variety of decisions they are making is to consult with managers in various countries to get their opinions on how to address the situation. Rather than making no decisions, expanding the variety of decision-making to include line managers in various countries and getting their insight on what the employee engagement survey results mean

in their culture (Wiley, 2014) might provide a perspective that would allow for creative decisions that address global survey results.

Finding 4. It Is Likely That Employee Concerns Surrounding Survey Anonymity and Confidentiality Impact Survey Results and Subsequent Leadership Decisions

Theme 5 discussed in Chapter 4 went into detail about leaders' perceptions that employees were concerned with the confidentiality and anonymity when participating in the employee engagement survey. There is research that supports conducting a survey that is completely anonymous so employees can be confident that survey responses would not be linked them (Rice et al., 2012; Walker, 2012). Conversely, other literature points toward a survey that is confidential rather than completely anonymous, because leaders can gain greater details in knowing more about the group/organizational level or the individual from which the results came (Van Rooy, Whitman, Hart, & Caleo, 2011). If an organization chooses complete anonymity, employers should make every effort to conceal the identity of employees so that results cannot be linked back to an individual employee or to the group or organizational level. For example, according to Walker (2013), organizations should avoid analyzing small groups separately to further assure employees that their comments and scores cannot be linked back to them. If an employer is ensuring confidentiality, to help ensure confidentiality and develop trust among employees, companies should bring in a third-party vendor or consultant to distribute the survey and gather and distribute results, thereby helping employees feel more secure about participating in the survey (Kelleher, 2014).

It appeared that the leaders in this study did not know if the survey was anonymous or confidential in nature, as these terms were used interchangeably during the interviews. Based on the definitions stated earlier and the leaders' comments (i.e., how they could identify the

directors when sorting the survey results and making the decision to restructure), it is the researcher's opinion that the survey was confidential rather than anonymous. It was also not clear what was specifically articulated to employees (i.e., whether the survey was anonymous or confidential). The leaders interchanged the terms anonymity and confidentiality throughout the interviews, so it is quite likely that these terms were not clearly defined to the employees. Ethically, leaders should explain to employees whether the survey is anonymous or confidential (Van Rooy et al., 2011).

Some organizations have moved away from anonymous surveys and toward confidential surveys. In these situations, it is likely that organizations are using a tie-back approach to engagement surveys (Van Rooy et al., 2011). In the tie-back approach, leaders can link or tie back pieces of information from the survey, such as an email, department name, length of tenure, or name of supervisor back to an individual or group. Van Rooy et al. (2011) argued the benefits of confidentiality over anonymity. They explained that top talent and high potential employees are critical to organizations and being able to tie back their data is important. This seemed to be the case with the leaders who were interviewed. Van Rooy et al. (2011) explained that it is not uncommon for high potential employees to view the organization differently than the general population and that leaders should be aware of what this group is thinking and the engagement level of this group.

It was evident from the comments of the leaders that despite hiring a third-party vendor, there was still a concern held by some employees that their comments and scores could be traced back to them. As Connie put it, "There are pockets of people who may have some fear about what's going to be done with the data... is it confidential... can it be traceable?" Hanna said employees are skeptical: "You say it's anonymous, but is it really?" Buddy shared the same

sentiment: “We stress the anonymity of it. There’s still conspiracy people out there that think... it’s not confidential.”

The real challenge for the leaders is that this confusion surrounding the lack of anonymity and confidentiality held by some employees is likely to result in employees holding back their true feelings when answering the questions, thereby skewing the results. Employees may be more inclined to mark neutral or err on the side of slightly higher scores than risk being too negative. This was expressed by one of the leaders in an interview. The leaders expressed that they had concerns about answering too honestly, were worried that the comments could be traced back to them, and they admitted holding back on answering honestly. To help quell this internal angst of employees, leaders need to clearly explain whether the survey will be confidential or anonymous, define what these terms mean, and clarify how the information from the survey impacts the employee (Van Rooy et al., 2011), the organization, and how the results will be used to inform leader decisions.

Finding 5. It Appears That Organizational Culture Impacts Employee Engagement Survey Results and Leadership Decisions

Schein (2010) explains that the forces of culture, whether in a society or an organization, are powerful. It is important for leaders to understand what drives cultural forces within an organization or risk falling victim to these forces when they go awry, or perhaps worse, “normalize” them when “puzzled, irritated, and anxious” (p. 9) about what is occurring. May and Mumby (2005) discussed the emergence of organizational culture and its relevance to employees’ “quality and meaning of their work lives” (p. 3). Although the global organization used for this study has been in existence for more than two decades, the more than 35 acquisitions over the years have diluted the culture of the organization, so much so that the

leaders explained during the interviews that the culture felt much like a startup and lacked a clear organizational and cultural employee connection throughout the entire organization. This lack of connectedness led to a crisis of identity for the employees and leaders alike, as discussed in Theme 2 in Chapter 4.

It was evident in the leaders' comments that this was a pervasive challenge. Hanna, a senior-level leader, shared that "the number one challenge that [she has] seen, and this was very much represented in [the survey] data, is that people struggle with an identity. They don't know who they belong to anymore." When considering the decisions that need to be made by the leaders based on the survey results and the volume of acquisitions, it presents a challenge to the leaders. Based on the comments in the interviews, except the Senior Vice President of Human Resources who did not choose to comment on the culture, leaders understand the impact that the acquisitions have on the employees. Because employees are being asked to assimilate into an undefined and eclectic culture, it makes sense that employees would have an organizational identity crisis. Employees, based on the comments of the leaders, are torn between the identity of who they were prior to being acquired, even if the previous environment was dysfunctional (Schein, 2010), and the uncertainty of who they are being asked to become in the new eclectic organizational culture (Schein, 2010).

Rice et al. (2012) offer that organizational culture is just the sum of an organization's behaviors and practices, and when you "get culture right" (p. 104), it leads to a strong foundation for engagement. When it comes to decision-making, they state, "[Culture] reveals itself in every decision, from what time you show up to work to whether you proceed with an acquisition" (Rice et al., 2012, p. 104). Acquisitions can threaten an organization's culture with the influx of new employees (Rice et al., 2012). Because of the number of acquisitions and challenges posed

by an attempted assimilation of employees among business units and groups, and the ensuing crisis of identity among employees, leaders tended to focus on the culture within their own business units as an attempt to stabilize the culture and the employee experience. This was apparent when the question was asked of the leaders to describe the culture of the organization, and they consistently replied, “Of my business unit/function or the organization?” This indicated to the researchers that there was a dichotomy of culture within the organization. It was also evident that employees and leaders experienced challenges because of this dichotomy when trying to cooperatively work across business units or functions. Thus, leadership decisions based on the results were focused on individual business units/groups/functions, with the exception of strategic decisions made by more senior leaders, such as restructuring, increased corporate communication, and global outsourcing.

In the research Weese (1995) conducted, it was determined that, when building organizational culture, the amount of transformational leadership being practiced can make an impact. It is unclear from the leader interviews or the coding and analysis if one type of leadership style was promoted and practiced at the organization over another, or rather an eclectic blend of styles based on the choice of the leader. Organizational leaders who practice high transformational leadership are more likely to have robust cultures and experience employee commitment, consensus, productivity, and retention (Weese, 1995). It was also unclear if any of these leaders could be considered dysfunctional leaders (Rose, Shuck, Twyford, & Bergman, 2015). While it is unclear which style of leadership is predominantly practiced or what level of leadership dysfunction exists within the organization, what was clear is that the organization lacked a sense of cultural identity. This led to an identity crisis among employees as

they attempted to assimilate into the organization—it was reflective in the survey results and impacted leader decisions.

Implications

As identified in Chapter 2, the seminal study of Kahn (1990) focused on the impact that work engagement and disengagement has on organizations. As the understanding of employee engagement began to move from theory to practice (Coco et al., 2011; Harter et al., 2002; Kappor & Kabra, 2014; Phillips, Ray, & Phillips, 2016; Van Rooy et al., 2011; Wells & Bravender, 2016; Wiley, 2014), and business leaders began to take notice of the impact of employee engagement and disengagement on organizations, leaders and HR managers began to routinely deploy surveys to measure employee engagement (Gallup, 2013; Phillips et al., 2016; Sugheir et al., 2011; Wiley, 2014).

While the literature has shown that measuring engagement has become a more common practice within organizations, what is less understood is how leaders are using employee engagement survey data results to make decisions (Purcell, 2014; Sugheir et al., 2011).

Researchers are then faced with the question: *How do business leaders use employee engagement data to make decisions?* Answering this question is important because it helps employee engagement researchers, HR professionals, and business leaders understand how leaders use employee engagement survey results to make decisions.

Based on the leaders' definitions and examples of engagement and the merits of having an engaged workforce, it appeared that the concept of employee engagement launched with Kahn's (1990) seminal work made its way into mainstream business practices. Furthermore, leaders appeared empathetic toward employees' concerns surrounding the confidentiality and anonymity of surveys and hiring a third-party vendor to quell those concerns (Kelleher, 2014). It

seemed that the leaders had not fully grasped an understanding of the difference between a survey that is anonymous versus one that is confidential. It was also unclear if the leaders understood the implications that each type of survey had on the employees and on the leaders' ability to use the survey results to make decisions (Van Rooy et al., 2011).

The interviews also revealed that the leaders valued the survey process and had closely analyzed the employee engagement survey results (Rice et al., 2012; Walker, 2012). It was apparent from the leaders' comments that they could express what they had learned from the results, as well as what surprised and frustrated them about the survey results. This indicated that they had read the results and were more likely to be informed about how the survey results were used in decision-making. The interviews also revealed a general desire by the leaders to do their best to act on the results, although they acknowledged challenges in their limitations to do so (Rice et al., 2012; Walker, 2012). For example, they were limited in their capability due to globalization and the different engagement needs of employees across the globe (Wiley, 2014). Leaders also felt limited in their ability to act on the results because of their financial responsibilities to shareholders and stakeholders. It is likely that as jobs, business units, and entire operations are outsourced to low-wage countries, business leaders will continue to be faced with this leadership paradox: to balance employee engagement by investing in employees by hiring domestically versus meeting corporate financial goals by hiring in low-wage countries (Coco et al., 2011; Wells & Bravender, 2016; Wiley, 2014). Leaders were also limited in their ability to act on the results when the action or decision was outside of their capacity due to their title or their limited ability to influence change among their peers. These challenges should be noted by employee engagement researchers, HR professionals, and business leaders when considering how business leaders use employee engagement survey results to make decisions.

Because an organization's culture is so critical to engagement (Rice et al., 2012), creating a culture that listens to employees is imperative. In addition to utilizing the employee engagement data, leaders should involve their employees and consult with them about difficult situations (Vroom & Yetton, 1973) to identify solutions for the problems and face them together. Employee consulting can take on many forms, including focus groups, pulse surveys, team meetings, or even one-on-one discussions with employees (Kelly, 2014; Walker, 2012). Increased communication and feedback, as expressed in the leader interviews, is critical for leaders to stay connected to their employees (Burke, 2011). Training for new roles or cross-training to increase efficiency, reallocation of resources, job sharing, or even relocation are possible ways for employees and leaders to work together to find solutions to the challenges they face.

The best leaders will find ways to keep employees engaged, even through the most difficult of times (Van Rooy et al., 2011). When business leaders create a culture that listens to their employees, the paradoxes of leadership do not magically evaporate. Such a culture does however allow for increased communication and increased engagement when it comes to decision-making (Coco et al., 2011; Walker, 2012; Wiley, 2014). This may, in turn, reduce some of the paradoxical tensions experienced by leaders who previously made tactical and strategic decisions in a vacuum and help them use employee engagement survey results to make decisions that otherwise might not have been considered when problem solving.

Reflections as Scholar-Practitioner

The scholar-practitioner (SP) approach to research means that the SP is a sojourner that travels among four worlds: theory, research, knowledge, and practice (Jenlink, 2005; Machi & McEvoy, 2009). As an SP sojourner, I have learned to live comfortably in each of these worlds and nimbly move from one world to the other, interacting and integrating them in such a way

that it is difficult to imagine functioning independently of the influence that each world has on the other. This has allowed me to learn how to integrate my knowledge into practice without using theoretical jargon or complicated research processes in real work situations. The SP approach has given me a voice and a seat at the table, and most importantly, it has given me the opportunity to influence change.

My role as an SP has been to break down the silos that research and theory build and bridge the gap between new knowledge and real world practice. It is when these worlds are both integrated and demystified by the SP that new knowledge stands the greatest chance of penetrating practice and influencing real change. If the worlds of theory, research, knowledge, and practice remain in silos, real change is unlikely to occur. This is a travesty for scholars and practitioners alike.

Personal identity has proven to be critical in my development as an SP. Nganga (2011) challenges the SP by asking: Do you know who you are? And subsequently challenges: If you do not know who you are, how do you possibly expect to influence others? These questions challenged me to have a firm understanding of my positionality and to make me more aware of my own biases.

For nearly a decade, I have had the opportunity to meet with hundreds of business leaders who outsourced their HR and sought consultation to stay compliant with the latest laws and regulations to meet the HR requirements of their employees. The goal of meeting with the business leaders was to identify their HR needs and challenges, produce a strategic HR service plan, and then attempt to partner with the business leaders to influence change within their organization. After hundreds of meetings and hundreds of strategic HR service plans, I began to see a flaw in the information gathering process.

When creating a strategic HR plan, I only had one perspective of the needs and challenges that existed within an organization—that of the leaders. As an SP, the new information I was gaining challenged me to think differently about change, and in return, I was able to encourage those in leadership to think differently about how they could also influence change. I realized that what I lacked, and perhaps more importantly, what the business leaders lacked, was the voice and perspective of the employees. They were making decisions in a vacuum. I then began to educate business leaders on the importance of employee engagement and the negative impact disengagement had on the organization. Sharing knowledge comes naturally for me because of my background as an educator. My helper bend also made it easy for me to want employees to be heard. Knowing these things about myself was important so that I could keep them balanced as I engaged with the goals of the business leader.

Based off the new leader insights and the voice of the employees through their survey results, a strategic HR plan was created. Interestingly, although business owners were more aware, and to some extent more knowledgeable about the importance of employee engagement, what was less clear was how the leaders were going to use the survey results to make decisions. Answering this question led to the purpose of this study.

As I formed my SP identity as a sojourner in the worlds of theory, research, knowledge, and practice, my research topic began to take shape and my focus shifted from general to specific (Jenlink, 2005; Machi & McEvoy, 2009; Nganga, 2011). As I wrestled with my SP identity, I also wrestled with the topic and the study's identity. This refining of the study occurred as questions were asked and answered, literature was reviewed, and a research path was cleared (Machi & McEvoy, 2009). By narrowing the topic and then conducting a thorough literature review that provided a full spectrum of the scholarly conversation, I gained more insight into the

phenomenon (Machi & McEvoy, 2009).

In summary, it was made clear through this process, that my role as an SP was to act as a liaison between theory, research, knowledge, and practical application (Jenlink, 2005; Labree, 2003; Nganga, 2011; Short & Shinedell, 2012). Labree (2003) argues that what separates the SP is the experience they bring to the subject matter. He states, “This means they bring a storehouse of data to doctoral study, which they can and do draw upon in evaluating the utility and validity of the theories they encounter there” (p. 16). He goes on to say that regardless of the volume of information and data an author provides, experience tends to trump data alone. In referencing the scholar-practitioner, Short and Shinedell (2012) state, “This (scholar-practitioner) combines the applied nature of the practitioner with the learned nature of the scholar” (p. 473). The scholar-practitioner makes theories relevant and infuses life into them for those who utilize the data. Therefore, I have come to learn that my role as SP is not to argue for my perspective, but to argue for the truth as presented in the literature and in the research findings, the outcomes, and the implications for practice (Machi & McEvoy, 2009). In essence, the scholar-practitioner is not just a title or something that is put on and taken off at will. Instead, to become a real agent of change, it is a way of being, seeing, thinking, and acting (Jenlink, 2005).

Study Limitations and Future Research

This study was limited to one multi-national global organization that had approximately 1,500 employees. Although it was a global organization, all the leaders interviewed resided in the U.S. Even so, there was diversity among the leaders in the form of title, responsibility, and job function. For example, the study participants held a wide range of titles from senior vice president to manager roles. This study also included a range in tenure among the leaders from approximately 2 to 16 years. There was nearly an equal split in gender with four female leaders

and three male leaders.

Future research may want to consider greater diversity to include global leader decisions. For example, because the study was voluntary, it did not control for diversity of nationality or country of origin. The participant volunteers appeared to all be Caucasian, though this may not be true of the one participant who was interviewed on the phone. This study also did not control for age. Increased diversity in these areas may or may not impact the study outcomes and implications for practice.

Additionally, further research may want to vary the size of the organization where the research is conducted to better understand if the size of the organization has an impact on how business leaders use employee engagement survey results to make decisions. Therefore, a similar study could be conducted in two distinct areas. First, a similar study could be conducted with organizations that fall below the 1,000 to 1,500 employee size. Further distinctions may want to be made by the researcher where the employee range of an organization is narrowed to 20 to 99 employees, 100 to 499 employees, and 500 to 999 employees, as there may be unique challenges faced by these leaders in these various segments that may be different than the challenges of leaders in the 1,000 to 1,500 employee organization in terms of how they use employee engagement survey results to make decisions. The researcher might also want to control for global versus domestic leaders. Second, a similar study could be conducted in larger organizations that are above the 1,500 employee size. Again, the researcher might want to make a distinction as to where the employee count of an organization is narrowed, such as 2,500 to 4,999 employees, 5,000 to 9,999 employees, 10,000 to 20,000 employees, or 20,000 plus employees. Though less likely to control for with this size organization, the researcher also may want to control for global versus domestic leaders.

In conclusion, the researcher would want to look at the study findings and compare them for similarities and differences to get an understanding on the impact that organizational size and globalization has on leadership decisions based on employee engagement survey results. Finally, researchers should consider the implications this new knowledge would have on the intended audience: engagement researchers, HR professionals, and business leaders.

Chapter Summary

The idea for this study began with a vision to better understand how business leaders were using employee engagement survey results to make decisions. The goal was to use the findings that came from this study to inform those who would most benefit from this information (e.g., employee engagement researchers, HR professionals, and business leaders) so they could use this new knowledge in practical work settings. The study yielded findings that could be helpful to researchers and practitioners alike. This study also provided detailed insight into the journey that the scholar-practitioner faced as she engaged with her doctoral work, the elements of this study, and the world of work. It provided keen insight into how the rigors of the academic journey collided with the rigors of real world practice and how a metamorphosis slowly occurred that ultimately created an agent of change by transforming the way the scholar sees, thinks, and acts. With this new way of seeing, thinking, and acting, the scholar-practitioner could discuss limitations that exist in the study and provide viable solutions for future research. Because of this research experience and the rigors of the academic experience, the scholar-practitioner is now prepared to multiply this experience in future research journeys.

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Appendix

Interview Protocol

Research Question: *How do business leaders use employee engagement survey results to make decisions?*

Subject Questions: Subject questions were used to get a more-full understanding of the leader's role, the organization and ultimately answer the research question.

1. Share with me your title and briefly describe your role.
 - a. Follow up: How long have you been in this role?
 - b. Follow up: Describe the supervisory aspect of your position.
2. Describe what it feels like to be a part of this organization.
 - a. Follow up: Share an example of what you appreciate about the organization.
 - b. Follow up: Provide an example of what challenges you about the organization.
3. How often does the organization deploy an engagement survey?
 - a. Follow up: Share an interaction you experienced with employees regarding the *distribution* of the engagement survey?
 - b. Follow up: Describe an interaction regarding employees *taking* the engagement survey.
4. How would you define employee engagement?
 - a. Follow up: Describe an interaction or a process that you think represents engagement.
 - b. Follow up: How did this interaction or process come about?
 - c. Follow up: What did you learn about engagement from this interaction or process?
5. Explain the process of how your organization distributes the employee engagement survey results.
 - a. Follow up: Describe a meeting that you attended where the results were presented?
6. What have you learned about engagement in your organization?
 - a. Follow up: Describe something that you learned from these surveys that surprised you?
 - b. Follow up: What about the results confirmed your suspicions about engagement?

7. How did you use this information? (Based on the question and follow-ups from question #6)
 - a. Follow up: Share an example of how you used this information to make a decision?
 - b. Follow up: Explain a time when you may not have acted on the results.
8. What about the survey seems lacking?
 - a. Follow up: What is an example of how you take this into consideration when making decisions?
9. What is most useful about the survey?
 - a. Follow up: Describe a time when this influenced your decisions.
10. Based on what you know about the survey tool and process, share an example of what you would change going forward.
 - a. Follow up: Provide an example of how this change might impact your decision making.