

Impacts of Employee Engagement and Workforce Productivity on Retail Companies

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ABSTRACT: Employee disengagement has become a big concern for retail companies to increase productivity. In the United States, retail companies lose at least \$96 billion in revenue every year. Using transformational leadership theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies needed by retail companies to improve employee engagement and increase workforce productivity. From data collected using face-to-face open-ended interview questions with 4 retail business leaders located in the eastern region of the United States and who have experienced this phenomenon; three major themes emerged. The primary themes that emerged were professional development, collaboration, and work-life balance. Based on the tenets of transformational leadership, the findings indicated that the 3 major themes were strategic to promote employee engagement, improve workforce productivity and financial stability. The findings also reveal that potential leaders could use transformational leadership strategy to improve workforce productivity and financial stability, thereby improving the quality of life for the employees, economic independence, and wellbeing in the local community.

KEYWORDS: Job Satisfaction, Workforce Engagement, Business Productivity, Professional Development

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1. INTRODUCTION

The retail industry is among business sectors that are rapidly growing. Per Nakate [1], the retail industry is the second largest sector industry in the United States and recommends retail leaders to meet customers' expectations because of the market challenge, change customer behaviors, and economic forces. Rahman [2] added that employee engagement may influence employee intention to leave the organization which may affect productivity. Moreover, factor such as technological advances which makes easier work tasks may also have an impact on employee engagement and workforce productivity [3]. Olubiyi et al. [3] added that employee retention is an endless concern and may cost on average \$10,000 for employee replacement which may affect negatively the financial wealth of the organization. According to Rao [4], only 21% of employees are globally engaged. Leaders should have effective strategies to increase employee engagement and retention; therefore, reduce the risk of employee turnover in the workplace because motivated and engaged employees increase annually by twice the net income profits.

2. BACKGROUND

The role of business leaders to improve employee engagement,

productivity, and organizational performance is crucial for business sustainability [5]. Many organizations have invested in improving employee engagement and productivity; however, some of them lack managerial tools to sustain their strategies. Researchers warned that disengaged employees could affect workforce productivity and sustainability of retail businesses Consiglio et al. [6] because disengaged employees cost the United States industries upwards of \$345 billion of its GDP [7]. Retail leaders' inability to engage employees might erode profits, expand opportunities, or produce other adverse business-related outcomes [8]. Then, retail leaders should apply effective leadership skills to develop strategies in improving the level of employee engagement and employee performance to foster a collaborative working environment for organizational development [9].

3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite the effort of some business leaders to promote employee engagement and productivity, disengaged employees often have low self-esteem and unsatisfactory performance, which can negatively impact organizational productivity [6]. Results of Gallup research for 2015 and 2016 indicated that employee engagement has reached levels as low as 15% worldwide [10, 11]. This aspect has been analyzed by many researchers and the results on business are negative. Since employee engagement and workforce productivity are of interest to investigate and analyze low self-esteem and low performance on sales associates to increase workforce productivity.

4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies leaders of retail businesses use to engage

sales associates and increase workforce productivity. To respond to this question, this research explored effective strategies retail businesses need to increase employee motivation and then promote employee engagement and workforce productivity.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concepts of employee engagement and workforce productivity are used in different contexts and contribute to sustaining organization viability. In the following literature review, we explored the use of transformational leadership theory as the conceptual framework in the retail industry.

The additional analysis included a synthesis of employee engagement, job satisfaction, and workforce productivity to explore strategies retail business leaders use to engage employees and increase workforce productivity. When leaders demonstrate the characteristics of transformational leadership, employees are motivated and workforce productivity improves [12].

5.1 Transformational Leadership Theory

The conceptual framework chosen for this study was the transformational leadership theory. Bass introduced the transformational leadership theory in 1985 to outline how leaders could use their leadership abilities to motivate followers, build trust, promote creativity, engage employees, increase productivity, reduce turnover, and enhance professional development for organizational success [13]. Using 228 employees with a multifactor leadership questionnaire (MQL), Bass [13] also unfolded the relation between leaders and followers, which included followers' performance and leaders' approach for the wellbeing of the organizations. In concert with Bass [13], Moriano et al. [14] tested 186 employees in Spain and claimed that the transformational leaders' behavior influenced followers to produce extra effort by sharing an organizational vision and promoting opportunities for employees to grow in the workplace. Therefore, exploring Bass's [13] transformational leadership theory could help the leaders to improve the development and efficiency of employees in the organization.

Leaders may learn to use transformational leadership tenets to enhance their skills in fostering the quality of employee performance. Bass [13] identified the concepts of transformational leadership theory to assist leaders in understanding its effectiveness, which comprises four dimensions: (a) idealize influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) individualized consideration, and (d) intellectual stimulation. Bass [13] further added that these four dimensions helped leaders communicate their vision, achieve organizational goals, engage followers, display confidence, address followers' needs, and involve followers in the decision-making process. Seemingly, Breevaart et al. [15] posited that these characteristics empower leaders to stimulate thought, gain trust, buy-in, and provide mentorship to followers in the workplace. Moreover, Getachew and Zhou [16] confirmed that a leader's competence to improve employees' performance coincides with Bass's reference to

the tenets of transformational leaders. Business leaders' use of these four tenets might help facilitate strategies to improve employee engagement, increase workforce productivity, enhance employee performance, and change the organizational culture to foster organizational sustainability.

5.1.1 Inspirational motivation

Leaders with inspirational motivation could seek ways to create a positive work environment. Inspirational motivation results in self-confidence among employees [13]. In the 2017 study, Nguyen et al. [17] believed that inspirational motivation incrementally exerts effort through collaboration, which enabled followers to go beyond the call of duty. Other authors argued that a safe environment is crucial for employees to improve performance. Researchers Barling et al. [18] found that leaders used inspirational motivation to encourage employees to work beyond their needs by assuring a safe climate in the workplace. Barling et al. [18] concluded that a significant relationship exists between transformational leadership and occupational safety because leaders with transformational tenets could focus on climate safety and reduce occupational injuries. While evaluating the variables related to a worker's safety, Schulte et al. [19] learned about the legislation implemented in the organization to sustain employee safety, such as Occupational Safety and Health Act, Toxic Substances Control Act, and the Mine Safety and Health Act. Hence, leaders assuring a safe environment in the workplace could assure employees to feel positive about their work environment. Nonetheless, leaders should also focus on factors that help their followers to fit in the workplace which will be beneficial for employee engagement and workforce productivity.

5.1.2 Idealized influence

The concept of idealized influence originates from Bass [13], and he defined the term as role model tactics, which leaders could use to create a sense of purpose for employees that may create organizational commitment. In another study conducted by Khan et al. [20], the authors defined idealized influence as a sense of purpose, which is inspirational and embodies the charismatic attributes of a role model. To better understand how the use of idealized influence is critical to an organization, Shaw et al. [21] investigated 12 employees in Canada to examine whether their behavior aligned with transformational leadership. The authors essentially showed that idealized influence enabled leaders to deliver corporate missions allowing employees to understand the expectations and thrive to achieve organizational commitment. Consequently, participants in the study shared how leaders acted as role models, and because leaders cared about their wellbeing, employees were inspired to follow their leaders and remain committed to the organizational objectives. In concert with Shaw et al. [21], Quintana et al. [22] echoed that leaders using idealized influence sought to encourage work commitment by inspiring employees to work with extra effort. Conducting a series of statistical analyses in hotels located in Canary Island, Quintana et al. [22] further posited that leaders with idealized influence encouraged employees to perform beyond expectations by demonstrating a positive role model.

Involving 144 teachers, Andinasari et al. [23] conducted a quantitative study in schools of higher learning and learned that principals with high expectations enhanced the commitments of teachers, which influenced the teachers to demonstrate their best performance and act responsibly. Hence, the significance of idealized influence within the tenets of transformational leadership indicated that leaders who demonstrated attributes of a positive role model tend to enhance employees' dedication and commitment to the workplace.

5.1.3 Individualized consideration

Leaders using the concept of individualized consideration could help employees bring out their potential. Individualized consideration is one of the tenets of transformational leadership theory, which means leaders are addressing the specific needs of each employee [13]. Other researchers have further defined individualized consideration as a leader's ability to help employees grow professionally by understanding their employees' concerns and treating everyone in accordance with their uniqueness [16, 24]. Leaders who focus on the individual needs of employees may find that the results of an approach vary.

By empowering employees, leaders could accomplish organizational goals [25]. When employees find that their organizational goals are achievable, they are more likely to work hard for the organization [26]. For example, Cote [27] evaluated leadership styles and concluded that when transformational leaders empowered their followers by focusing on their needs, they eliminated the intrinsic and extrinsic incentives required by transactional leaders. Moreover, Nohe and Hertel [26] surveyed 761 employees to expand on the idea of transformational leadership and found that transformational leaders help employees to achieve organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) by making connections between employees' roles and organizational goals. The authors found that OCB enhanced the organizational environment to achieve extra-role behavior that leads to improved employee performance that, in turn, positively impacted the organization [26]. Hence, leaders should use the attributes of transformational leadership to empower employees to achieve organizational goals.

5.1.4 Intellectual stimulation

The final dimension of transformational leadership is intellectual stimulation that varies in the literature. Intellectual stimulation is leaders' ability to increase awareness [17], engender creativity [13, 20], challenge followers to test assumptions [28], and encourage followers to become innovative [29]. In a similar study, Choi et al. [30] noted transformational leaders use intellectual stimulation to build trust with employees, promote creativity and innovation, and foster critical thinking. Jena et al. [31] reported that intellectual stimulation was an important managerial practice in India within the retail industry as they account for more than 10 % of the country's global domestic product. Studying teachers in the Netherlands, Breevaart and Bakker [15] found that the school principal had considerable influence on

teachers' work engagement when leaders approached with intellectual stimulation. The authors further added that the school principal demonstrated intellectual stimulation by listening to the teachers' problems and guiding teachers to attend workshops for professional development [15]. The levels of empowerment granted to employees using intellectual stimulation may help employees to grow professionally, enhance creativity, and come up with innovative solutions to organizational issues.

Researchers have found that transformational leadership is effective because it may inspire employees, provide incentives, and motivate employees to maximize work performance. As evidenced with much of the findings in the literature, leaders' ability to exhibit transformational leadership traits influenced employees to achieve more than beyond. The tenets of transformational leadership facilitate business leaders to improve the quality of employee performance, which might lead employees to remain active in the workplace. Business leaders who use these tenets might provide numerous opportunities to improve the quality of employee performance that may lead to organizational success.

5.2 Employee Engagement

The success in engaging employees could depend on how the leader defines what constitutes engagement. Holland et al. [32] stated much debate exists behind defining employee engagement. Anitha [33] defined employee engagement as the levels of commitment, and involvement employees have in an organization, while Besieux et al. [29] defined employee engagement as the vigor, dedication, and absorption an employee has into their work. According to Vorina et al. [34], leaders must ensure employees invest time in understanding the organization's goals and values. Vorina et al. [34] supported the rationale by surveying 594 employees of public and nonpublic sectors in Slovenia using the Gallup questionnaire, which concluded with a suggestion that enthusiastic employees bring favorable results for the organization. Vorina et al. [34] further concluded that leaders must focus on their needs that make the employees satisfied at work, which resulted in employee engagement. To further understand employee engagement, Anthony-McMann et al. [35] examined 472 information technology professionals working in community hospitals and concluded that the success of employee engagement in organizations depends on three attitudinal factors: identification, involvement, and loyalty. The three factors highlighted the level of care and commitment, as well as employees' emotional investment towards organizations [35]. Moreover, using a sample of 109 managers in the technology industry, Yaakobi and Weisberg [5] conducted a quantitative study to evaluate how they kept employees engaged and argued that transformational leaders addressed both organizational and individual needs for positive employee engagement. Each of these approaches by the researchers indicated that the level of engagement varies based on leadership tactics. However, leaders should become aware of other factors to foster employee engagement in the workplace. Nonetheless, Rao [4] warned leaders that

disengaged employees could become liabilities of the organizations.

5.3 Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is an essential component for employees to remain active in the workplace. Several researchers have explored the effect of job satisfaction and employees' role within an organization. Job satisfaction is the fulfillment of a rewarding performance, which provides security to those engaged in the workplace [6, 36, 37]. While Prabowo et al. [38] surveyed 78 employees of Hotel Kartika Graha Malang in Indonesia and discovered that transformational leaders have no positive influence on employee performance but promote job satisfaction. Moreover, Bošković [39] surveyed 250 employees and found satisfied employees work harder when their income could cover the necessary living expenses. To further explore job satisfaction, Wu et al. [40] surveyed 424 employees from the media sector in Pakistan and concluded that work and life-related wellbeing influenced job satisfaction, and a worker's intention to stay engaged in the workplace. Additionally, Lindblom et al. [41] tested 208 frontline employees in the retail industry and confirmed that charismatic leaders, as an aspect of transformational leadership, promoted job satisfaction by helping them to understand the jobs and guide them with challenging goals. Though the findings revealed the significance of job satisfaction in the workplace, employees may need the availability of job resources which is crucial to increase engagement and productivity.

5.4 Workforce Productivity

Multiple methods exist to measure worker productivity. Dal Maso et al. [42] described the term productivity as the sustainability of human performance that leads to higher profitability. Oliver [43] suggested measuring productivity by subtracting expenses from revenues and then dividing that number by the number of employees. Oliver further argued that this sort of assessment of workforce productivity would provide an analysis of how well leaders are managing human resources to sustain superior performances over an extended period.

Several authors have examined factors that influence workforce productivity [44, 45]. Suhartanto and Brien [46] argued that psychologically engaged employees delivered high work productivity, which subsequently enhanced the overall performance of the organization. Ghosh [47] used methods of Lean Six Sigma (LSS) to determine if financial incentives enhance productivity. The author found that the variance of leadership style is the primary reason for fluctuation in employee engagement, which can affect low workforce productivity especially if there is a lack of financial incentives offered to employees. Dirani et al. [48] also added that communication, recognition, and involvement in decision-making could help employees to increase workforce productivity and the overall success of the organizations. Moreover, Yaakobi and Weisburg [5] studied employee self-efficacy to enhance productivity and concluded that

regardless of the leadership style, all leaders should continuously seek ways to improve workforce productivity. Employee motivation and retention are ideal strategies to promote sales. Leading or managing retail organizations may be challenging to enter new markets and compete efficiently [49]. Transformational leadership theory revealed that promoting job satisfaction enables managers to achieve their mission with success and prevent failure. Per Bass [13], the lack of engagement and satisfaction are among the primary factors that decrease productivity. Lantara [50] used a sampling method of data analysis to examine organizational factors that affect the human resources information system and engagement of South Sulawesi gubernatorial office staff. In his conclusion, Lantara [50] found that the human resources information system positively affected the motivation and engagement of the office staff. Tasoulis et al. [51] added that the role of real leaders should be to promote leadership integrity and compliance with the organization's culture which plays a crucial role in increasing productivity. Retail business leaders should be aware of using transformational leadership theory to promote the organization's culture and employee engagement to increase productivity.

6. METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

In this study, we used the qualitative research method to explore strategies leaders of retail businesses used to engage sales associates and increase workforce productivity. A qualitative research method was appropriate for this study because the goal was to explore what leaders of retail businesses are doing in engaging the sales associates and increasing workforce productivity. In a qualitative research method, researchers explore the participants' experiences in detail by examining the collected data from the interview responses [52]. A qualitative research method was effective in collecting data about participants' actions, strategies, and manners about the phenomenon [53, 52].

In a quantitative research method, researchers examine empirical evidence to test a hypothesis [52]. The quantitative research method was not appropriate for this study because we did not examine empirical evidence to test a hypothesis [52]. Researchers used mixed methods to combine both qualitative and quantitative methods [52]. The mixed-methods approach was not appropriate for this study, as quantitative components were not applied.

The design of this study was a multiple case study. Yin [52] recommended using the case study design because it requires direct observations and interviews of more than one individual involved in the phenomenon. Using a multiple case study gave us a better understanding of the strategies that leaders used to engage employees and increase workforce productivity. Other designs such as phenomenological design, which involves describing people's lives, or narrative which elicits stories using conversational interviews prompting a process of reflection of a person's experience were not appropriate for this study.

7. METHOD

7.1 Population and Sampling

The population sample of this study included a purposeful sampling of four retail leaders in the eastern region of the United States who have used successful strategies to engage employees and increase workforce productivity. The purposive sample was useful to select participants according to the needs of the study, and their knowledge and experience to obtain a rich understanding of the phenomenon [52].

We ensured the sample size was large enough that we could obtain data saturation to enhance the reliability of the study. In qualitative studies, there are no set rules to determine the number of participants; however, selecting the appropriate number improves the reliability and validity of a study [53, 52]. The participants' eligibility criteria were (a) be 18 years or older, (b) have 2 years of leadership experience in the retail industry located in the eastern region of the United States, (c) having supervised at least 500 employees in the retail industry, and (d) knowledge of successful strategies used to engage sales associates to increase workforce productivity. By selecting appropriate participants, we expected the participants to provide valuable and diverse perspectives.

7.2 Procedures

The research question for this qualitative study was: What strategies do leaders of retail businesses use to engage sales associates and increase workforce productivity? And the six interview questions were: (a) What strategies have you used to engage sales associates and increase workforce productivity? (b) How did sales associates respond to the different strategies you used to increase productivity? (c) Which strategies were most effective and why? (d) What leadership skills did you use to increase employee engagement? (e) What are your key measures and indicators of employee engagement and workforce productivity? (f) What other information would you like to add regarding strategies to increase employee engagement?

We organized interviews with participants within 45 minutes in their chosen locations. We used the interview data and the company's documents to obtain data saturation. We also used the methodological triangulation methods, member checking process, and enhanced the reliability of the research findings. We ensured validity and reliability to establish credibility by mitigating bias and ensuring trustworthiness in the data analysis. As stated by Yin [52], validity is the integrity that the researchers can apply to ensure the findings, and reliability is the consistency of the research analysis in which researchers use the research method repeatedly to check the credibility of the findings. Per Yin [52], member checking enhances the reliability of the research by confirming the data accuracy with the participants.

8. DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis includes collection, examination, categorization, tabularization, and testing [52]. Yin mentioned in case study research that findings are likely to be more

convincing and accurate when researchers triangulate the data from multiple sources. Researchers use triangulation to provide detailed information about additional sources of the organizations [55, 53]. Using the methodological triangulation process, we were able to apply multiple types of methods that included the data gathered from the interview and review of companies' documents. The appropriate data analysis process for this study was methodological triangulation because methodological triangulation includes multiple methods to examine the phenomenon [54, 55]. Researchers also use methodological triangulation to enhance the reliability and validity of the data analysis [54].

For data analysis, we used the NVivo software to transcribe and treat the data. NVivo software is the data analysis software that allows the researchers to analyze data gathered from interviews and organize the data with the emerging themes and code and analyze the data by counting and sorting [56]. For data protection, we assigned the code X1,..., X5 to protect research participants' information, as suggested by Yin [52]. Transformational leadership theory provided a lens for understanding the findings that might assist the leaders in retail organizations to rely on the strategies to increase employee engagement and workforce productivity. The results might provide useful information to improve the lack of leadership strategies in the retail organization.

9. FINDINGS

Using a thematic analysis, three major themes emerged from NVivo 12: (a) professional development, (b) collaboration, and (c) work-life balance.

Theme 1: Professional Development. During data analysis, we assigned codes to phrases and sentences, constituting the concepts relating to training and mentoring, which were categorized under the professional development theme. While professional development is not new to the organization, the ability to be able to facilitate employees' growth successfully was essential for the organizations to learn. According to Chidi and Victor [57], professional development practice consists of training, counseling, and mentoring. Kuijpers et al. [58] revealed that managers helped employees to identify their strengths, weaknesses, and interests through a series of workshops, which resulted in increased employee engagement and productivity and decreased absenteeism. All four leaders viewed the professional development strategy as an effective business practice to increase employees' capabilities in improving the productivity of the organization. Participants further stressed the need for a continuous learning environment to polish employees' competency levels that included soft skills, management style, safety, information technology, and customer service skills to increase workforce productivity.

Training. Participants mentioned that they made training mandatory for their employees because they believed that it was the best method for employees to upgrade their knowledge and skills to fit in the workplace [57]. X1 and X2 added that they designed systematic training so that employees

could quickly grasp the purpose and be able to apply their learning in the workplace. For example, employees working in the merchandising department go through training in reading the product labels, shelves adjustment, printing labels, and stocking merchandise. A well-structured training plan enabled employees to improve their performance, which resulted in increased productivity [59]. X3 added, "Since employees are crucial for the company's success, we need to provide an ongoing learning environment for employees so that they remain emotionally connected to work". X2 further added that improvements in the employees' professionalism were noticeable after the completion of training programs because employees were proactive in completing daily tasks, capable of dealing with customers' issues in a better manner and treated their coworkers with increased respect.

X4 and X5 shared the company's documents, such as a yearly training program, agenda, and a pie chart of the outlined topics. Some of the topics presented were customer service, soft skills, money metrics, safety, time management, information system application, cultural diversity, growth, and opportunity. While reviewing the training program documents, we found that managers grouped the training topics in modules which included the agenda, assignment, and contextual materials. For example, in the money metrics module, managers wanted employees to assess the new opportunity based on Porter's five forces model and helped employees to understand their potential customers, market segment, and competitive advantage. The robust knowledge gained from the well-structured training program could empower employees to become proactive and eager to invest their capabilities to their fullest.

X2 and X4 said that the training also helped new hires to understand the use of technological tools and the procedural steps in completing the planograms. X1 and X4 explained that all new employees were required and mandated training to align their skills and job requirements. X2 added that the benefit of training resulted in employees doing the task without the supervisor's involvement. X2 and X5 added that employees completed a short survey after completing the training session, which helped them to assess their learning goals. Participants shared pre-and post-survey data in a graph that demonstrated employees' responses in handling the business processes. The graphs showed employees' improved management and soft skills. The survey results also indicated improvement in employees' work efficiency after attending the training.

Mentoring. When leaders act as coaches, they could elevate employees' competency levels. Besieux et al. [29] stated that mentoring employees could increase the level of competence and engagement. Mentoring is the sharing of one's experience to guide the employees to achieve professional growth [57]. Mentoring is crucial in inspiring employees to grow professionally by following their mentors. Leaders should mentor employees by empowering them to understand their capabilities. Gannon's [60] study revealed that leaders encouraged employees to realize the importance of developing

their careers. As mentors, participants shared their experiences with their employees to motivate them. X1 and X2 played the role of an employee and showed how they would handle a demanding customer by staying calm and building a rapport. Such a reflective approach helped employees to stay involved and take the initiative in the workplace.

X2 and X3 showed that they actively listened to their employees, which motivated employees to pay close attention to completing their jobs. Xe added that "Even if it's a small issue, I took the time to listen and provide a solution, which demonstrated my role as a supporting colleague.". Participants mentored employees through verbal communication, which created a strong bonding between employees and managers which increased mutual respect. For example, X4 presented some verbal examples such as, "I think you have to leave early to pick up your kid from school, don't worry, you can leave now, I can take care of the next customer." "You have done a quiet of lot of work today, thank you so much for moving the line so fast, keep up the good work" added by X1. Such a verbal mechanism inspired employees to be proactive and dynamic. This finding agrees with Shaw et al. [21], who revealed that leaders mentored employees through conversation and verbal appreciation.

Participants sought to strengthen employees' skills so they could better handle any complex situation. X4 and X5 coached employees to understand their potential. For example, X4 and X5 helped employees to navigate the company's technological database tools to assist them in learning about the products and customers' buying behaviors. In support of the findings of participants, Nahar [61] reported that leaders in the organization mentored employees to gain important knowledge about the organization by using information system platforms. Such business practice empowered employees to understand the performance of the organization through enhanced data, which could assist employees in acting accordingly.

Because of the managers' greater responsibilities, they guided their employees to grow by mentoring, which could strengthen their employees' ability to adapt to responsibility. Participants strongly believed that their mentoring approach helped employees to perform their tasks responsibly. Hence, they coached employees to grow and acquire professional skills through training and mentoring, which would increase employees' self-esteem and level of engagement. Through mentoring, leaders aided employees to reflect on their performance and increase understanding of their roles and responsibilities to improve performance.

Table 1: Professional Development

Actions	Number of Participant	Percentage of Participant
	Agreement/ 5 Participants	Agreements/ 5 Participants
Training	4	80%
Mentoring	5	100%

Theme 2: Collaboration. X1, X2, X4, and X5 aimed to create a collaborative environment for employees to increase the level of engagement. Collaboration is the second theme that emerged from the responses gathered during the interviews. All participants often used the phrases *decision-making, ethical culture, code of conduct, safe environment, silo, fragmentation, and teamwork* to communicate expectations and foster cohesion between employees, which are grouped under the collaboration theme. Decision-making, ethical culture, and teamwork are factors that influence the output from collaboration [62]. Effective collaboration depends on ethical culture [63], availability of resources and teamwork [64, 65]. Collaboration is a critical factor for leaders to promote engagement. Researchers noted that leaders could increase the level of engagement when employees work in a collaborative environment, which allows them to have access to organizational information [62, 64, 65]. The subthemes that emerged from the theme of *Collaboration* are decision-making, ethics, and teamwork.

Decision-Making. Participants noted that working in a silo created poor performance. When employees work in a silo, they do not gain much knowledge around the surroundings, which could impact their engagement leading to poor performance [65]. According to Tian and Zhai [66], engagement at work enhances knowledge distribution resulting in improved productivity. X2 and X4 invited employees to be part of a decision-making process to deter organizational silos and build a collaborative working environment. X3 and X4 noted that employees' participation in a decision-making process enabled them to identify problems, understand implications, and generate innovative solutions. X4 stated that "when we invited employees to be part of departmental meetings, employees showed enthusiasm". According to Chen et al. [67], leaders should allow employees to share their voices to promote ethical practice in the workplace. X2 added, "Employees should have open space to share their voice, otherwise they won't be committed to the organization. And we have to ensure that their voice matters". Such enthusiasm results in a sense of belonging to the team, and in return, employees take ownership of their work and engage in improving productivity. Nguyen et al. [17] suggested that business leaders assisted employees in understanding the scope of decision-making and its implications. X3 stated that collaboration in the workplace enabled employees to share thoughtful suggestions during the decision-making process, which they found beneficial for the company. Participants stated that they shared the strategic goal and performance of the organization through a whole staff meeting, which resulted in collaborative efforts and enabled employees to think cohesively. X5 stated, "when employees understand the vision of the organization, they come up with innovative ideas related to the product design and process enhancement." Sharing of the company's vision could foster collegiality and social interaction in the workplace [68]. The findings also revealed the importance of employees' attachment with the companies by showing that the managers cared about their employees' decisions, which increased the employees' self-esteem and collaborative thinking and

resulted in an increase in their engagement. X1, X2, X4, and X5 noted that when employees were part of the decision-making process, they stayed connected to the organization and contributed meaningfully. Participants stated that the decision-making process enabled participants to view the business through the lens of the company's leaders. Knowing important information from the meetings was beneficial as they were able to understand the expectations. The findings supported by Amerine et al. [69], who reported that employees attending meetings as part of the decision-making process are likely to know the organization better leading to increase employee engagement. Similarly, Oluwatayo, et al. [70] revealed that managers inviting employees during the decision-making process increased employees' engagement and commitment. Oluwatayo et al. [70] concluded that employees participating in the decision-making process developed a resilient working relationship with the managers and colleagues.

Ethics. Ethical practice in the workplace is essential for business sustainability. Ethics in the workplace are the rituals of business tactics that constitute ethical behavior [71]. X1 and X3 suggested that promoting ethical practices can foster a collaborative environment in the workplace. X1 added that the implementation of ethical practices motivated employees, which lead to improving the level of engagement in the workplace. Participants ensured that the employees are aware of the code of conduct to protect employees' wellbeing and the reputation of the companies. For example, companies will not hire any minor who is under 18 years old. X4 also stated, "When it comes to hiring and promoting employees, we make fair decisions regardless of the gender. If my employees find that I am impartial, I will stand out as a role model to them". Recognizing gender equality illustrated an ethical culture in the workplace [72]. Furthermore, all participants noted that a collaborative workplace involves educating employees about the companies' policies relating to ethics, workplace violence, and workplace safety. X3 said, "Employees must complete the online training on workplace violence every year. Educating employees and acquiring knowledge allow employees to avoid any unethical practice". Such business practices promoted collaboration by assuring employees to be aware of the threats and preventive measures. Therefore, employees valued the organizational goals and abided by the companies' rules. The findings from the participants indicated a strong sense of collaboration nurturing employees to work with passion. This finding agrees with Hodges [73], who reported that leaders go over the companies' policies in the department meetings, which resulted in an increased awareness of the companies' regulations for employees to work with ethics and attention. Following the business policies promoted organizational success and sustainability [74]. Likewise, Colaco and Loi [71] in their research, concluded that the identification of business ethics required clarity of work responsibilities and transparency of safe working conditions. Leaders who possess the attribute of transformational leadership theory encourage employees to work in an assuring a safe climate in the workplace [18]. Hence, the collaboration in the workplace involved cohesion, a safe working climate, and an ethical infrastructure to enhance employee engagement.

Teamwork. Participants stressed that teamwork in the workplace could enhance employees' creativity and collaboration. Teamwork enables a group of people to work in collaboration to achieve a common goal [64, 65]. X1 and X3 stated that reducing conflict and sharing knowledge was an essential function of an organization to promote collaboration. Participants further mentioned that they promoted job rotation and team flexibility by incorporating team building, which led team members to share their expertise and increase knowledge sharing. X1 identified the need for teamwork and helped the team members to create goals to promote collaboration among team members. Supervisors allowed employees to work in a group in tasks relating to inventory management, sales, customer issues, and complaints. Teamwork helped the employees to engage in gaining and sharing knowledge, which led to completing the tasks productively. X4 also added, "Team members will not be engaged if they don't have an effective communication plan, so I have to make sure that regular meetings are taking place among members to stay on top of the progress." Clear communication between the team members is crucial to avoid confusion and help leaders enforce expectations [75]. To promote a collaborative setting, X3 stated, "we ensure that employees understand the goal of the organization when working in a team context, which helps them to carry out their job responsibilities with dedication". Per Dirks [75], employees must work in the team context to achieve the organizational goal.

Table 2: Collaboration

Actions	Number of Participant Agreement/5 Participants	Percentage of Participant Agreements/5Participants
Decision Making	4	80%
Ethics	5	100%
Teamwork	4	80%

Theme 3: Work-Life Balance. The establishment of a work-life balance enables employees to stay engaged in the workplace. Participants stated a thorough understanding of factors affecting work-life balance to foster employee engagement. Work-life balance refers to employees' ability to balance work and life to obtain a sense of purpose, pleasure, and comfort to meet the demands of the workplace [76]. Leaders should promote a healthy work environment for employees by providing workshops and promoting healthy habits such as exercise, nutrition, music listening, relaxation, and meditation [77]. The sub-themes under work-life balance are *burnout and stress*, *recognition*, and *employees' wellbeing*.

Burnout and Stress. When employees feel stress in the workplace, they are more likely to experience burnout [78]. Burnout is an exhaustion that employees experience at work [79]. X1 and X2 added that they do not monitor their employees because close monitoring resulted in employee burnout. When leaders micromanage employees closely, employees experience burnout [80]. Instead, X1 and X2 approached employees in a friendly manner and inquired about employees' wellbeing. For example, when employees call in sick, X1 inquired about their health condition and

showed supportive action. X3 also invited employees for lunch out to promote social interaction. X5 added, "it is very important to promote social interaction because this gives them a chance to talk and relax. They also discuss important aspects of work, for example, the deadline to complete the tasks, or discussing a product on sale". While X1 added, "I intentionally take a lunch break with my employees and have a casual talk. In doing so, I noticed that my employees shared their tension." Harjanti and Todani [81] posited that leaders fostered social capital by increasing trust among employees and reducing insecurity, which led employees to remain engaged and decrease burnout. Harjanti and Todani [81] defined social capital as the values and potential, achieved through social interactions with other employees. Likewise, Kuriakose et al. [82] concluded in their study that leaders care for the employees' wellbeing by inviting them for a group lunch to foster social interaction, which improves collegiality and engagement.

The companies' documents from participants revealed that participants incorporated a healthy work-life balance for the employees. A review of the company's documents revealed that employees are eligible to take annual sick leave. X1, X2, and X5 added that they promoted healthy habits for their employees by encouraging them to take short breaks in the workplace and supported employees to use their annual leave for vacation. X4 added, "working for long hours can be stressful, so I have to make sure that my employees are taking a break and not exceedingly more than 8 hours shift". According to Hsu et al. [83], long working hours resulted in work-life imbalance and job dissatisfaction for employees. X1, X4, and X5 stated such business practices helped their employees to mitigate stress and show commitment. All participants found an increase in employee engagement after implementing a work-life balance strategy. Lack of resources in the workplace impacted the motivation of employees to remain energetic in completing the task [84].

Recognition. The level of engagement may increase when leaders recognize employees' efforts and competent performance in the workplace. Zelles [85] found that the level of employee engagement increased when leaders appreciated employees' work. X1 and X2 claimed that when they provided verbal appreciation to their employees for their efforts, the employees remained enthusiastic in the workplace. All participants added that they noticed a sense of job satisfaction and enthusiasm in their employees' behavior when supervisors recognized and appreciated their employees. X3 and X5 shared that they even celebrated employees' efforts by awarding them for their outstanding performance in the workplace. For example, X4 stated that "when employees received an award like *Employee of the Month*, they become very energetic and excited in performing their regular task and work more than they are asked for." X4 further added, "It's quite competitive to achieve the award because they have to fulfill the criteria such as being punctual at work, taking customers' efficiently, effectively completing the task, and so on." This mechanism of recognizing the employees enhanced the employees' motivation as added by X1, which aligned with Lin and Kellough's [86] study. X2 added that the award

takes place twice a year, which inspired the employees to prove themselves and remains engaged in the workplace. While X4 said, “Employees have some expectation in return for their hard work. Sometimes, they communicate with me about promotions or salary increases. As a manager, my responsibility is to take care of my employees, rather than thinking about the profit only”. The finding is in agreement with Huertas-Valdivia et al. [87], who revealed in their study that recognizing employees on time enhanced employee engagement. The participants focused on developing optimistic attitudes that resulted in the physical and mental fitness of their employees.

When managers praise employees for their skilled performance, employees gain a sense of accomplishment as added by X1. Interestingly, X2 and X5 claimed that positive compliments to their employees are an important aspect of practice in the workplace. For example, X1 stated, “every time I walk by the employees, I simply talk about the positive aspect of their work. I use phrases like a *good job, really thank you for your stunning contribution this afternoon. Customers seem happy when you serve them*”. X4 and X5 even confirmed that they praised their employees in person and in the presence of other employees, which motivated them to play an active role in the company. Seemingly, Khan et al. [20] confirmed that a leader’s ability to praise their employees increased the level of engagement in the workplace. Furthermore, Bass [13] confirmed that leaders with transformational leadership tenets motivated employees through their proactive personalities.

Employees’ Wellbeing. Employees’ well-being is one of the important factors of work-life balance that included workplace safety, quality, and job satisfaction [88]. X1 and X3 claimed that sometimes they did not make employees’ wellbeing a priority, which might create stress and dissatisfaction for the employees. As suggested by Wu et al. [40], X1 and X4 stated that, when leaders cared about the wellbeing of their employees, the level of engagement and retention increased. X1, X2, and X5 expressed concern that often they found it challenging to pay close attention to employees’ needs. Despite the negligence, participants made an effort to inquire about the needs of the employees. X1 believed that their supportive actions would help employees to complete their tasks routinely and increase the level of engagement. For example, X1 offered schedule flexibility for employees, which created a positive state of mind and increased employee engagement. X1 also guided their employees in understanding and completing the task. For example, X1 added, “I loved helping my employees with day-to-day tasks such as completing the data entry to prepare inventory and sales report.” X1 added, “I also reminded employees about their upcoming tasks so that employees did not feel overwhelmed. Sometimes, employees forget to check the temperature of the refrigerator, for which the food could get stale”. Thus, X1 gave them a friendly reminder, which motivated the employees to stay on top of their tasks. Such actions helped the employees to feel that their efforts are not in vain, and their managers cared about their hard work. The need for the managers to pay close attention to the employees’ schedule

flexibility is significantly important in achieving task completion [89].

X4 and X5 also mentioned how they provided extra attention to disabled employees’ needs, which can motivate them to work hard. If the disabled employee felt tired, X1 and X2 offered spare break time to rest. X4 stated, “We have to ensure that employees get thoughtful attention, so they exhibit extra efforts at work”. Hughes et al. [90] examined employees with disabilities and found employers promoted employee wellbeing by supporting them to take a break, coping up with stress, using electrical gadgets to track their tasks, and providing the flexibility of the schedule. “We even have office parties, where we invite all employees regardless of their position in the organization,” added X4. Such recreational activities helped the employees to have a positive state of mind, which improved collegiality and motivation”. Researchers investigated 400 employees from 35 firms in Pakistan and found that fostering cultural programs and recreational activities enhanced employees’ wellbeing [88].

Table 3: Work-Life Balance

Actions	Number of Participant Agreement/5 Participants	Percentage of Participant Agreements/5 Participants
Burnout and Stress	4	80%
Recognition	5	100%
Employees’ Wellbeing	5	100%

10. IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Implication for Business

The application of this study to professional practice included providing retail leaders with strategies to increase employee engagement and improve workforce productivity. Retail leaders need to understand the important factors that contribute to disengaged employees and strategies to decrease their impact on workforce productivity. Employee disengagement is a concern for the retail organization because it affects negatively productivity [91]. An engaged employee would benefit the retail organizations in improving customer service, increasing employee and customer retention, and enhancing productivity [13].

Exploring effective strategies may help retail leaders to understand the phenomenon that affects employee engagement in the retail organization. Retail leaders may better understand effective strategies needed to engage employees from this research study. Retail leaders may use this research as a guide to improve their business practice. The results from this study could contribute to an understanding of these effective business practices in-depth, in which retail leaders, business consultants, and business owners may seek to improve the level of employee engagement and workforce productivity.

10.2 Implication for Social Change

The implications for positive social change include the potential of retail leaders to identify effective business practice that improves employee engagement and workforce

productivity. Business leaders need to understand the business practices that influence workforce productivity and affect the local community and the country's economy [92]. If the business leaders contribute to the increase of employee engagement, financial gain may increase, which may result in job stability.

Employees' job stability may affect social change by generating more revenue for the government, which could help the government invest in multiple social activities. To promote a positive social change, Fowler et al. [93] suggested that business leaders need to implement social activities to enhance positive social change for the wellbeing of the local community members. Business leaders and employees pay taxes, which would increase the development of the local community and the country's economy. The government leaders could invest for example in public schools to educate students on global warming. The findings from this study could also help the retail leaders to work on social projects like global warming to create awareness in the local community. The implications for social change also include exploring effective strategies that might increase the level of employee engagement to enhance workforce productivity, local community, and the economy.

11. CONCLUSION

The employees' poor performance harms the profitability and sustainability of the business. Some retail leaders lack strategies to improve employee engagement and increase workforce productivity. The objective of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the tenets of transformational leadership theory as the lens to analyze strategies some retail leaders used to increase employee engagement and workforce productivity.

The three emerging themes or strategies that emerged from data analysis included: (a) professional development, (b) collaboration, and (c) work-life balance. Retail leaders used these three strategies as managerial tools to improve employee engagement and workforce productivity. All four participants confirmed using professional development, collaboration, and work-life balance as effective strategies to improve employee engagement. Using transformational leadership as the lens in analyzing the multiple case study involving the retail organization filled a gap in the literature. Owners and managers of retail organizations could use these themes to improve the level of employee engagement and workforce productivity.

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