GIVE THEM WINGS! EXPLORING LATINO EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES

ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT THROUGH QUALITATIVE

PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY

BY

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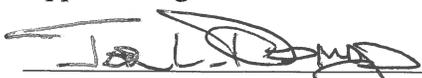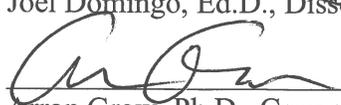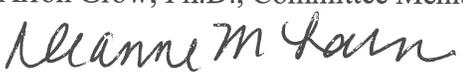A Doctoral Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment

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ABSTRACT

Employee engagement has emerged as a relevant and noteworthy topic in the discourse on organizational leadership and sustainability, as engaged employees are a source of organizational productivity, positive morale, competitive advantage, and retention (Gallup, 2017; Albrecht, Bakker, Gruman, Macey, & Saks, 2015). Workforce composition has changed significantly over the years, and with this change comes the need to explore evolution in organizational strategy and workplace engagement. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the role of cultural values in shaping the attitudes, beliefs, and work experiences of Latinos employed at a major global specialty retailer. A total of 11 participants were interviewed using semi-structured, open-ended interviews. The data were coded by hand, using a whole-parts-whole process to identify conceptual categories, and led to the emergence of the three themes of workplace relationships, feeling valued, and leadership communication. The results of the study should provide new and useful information for executive leaders and human resources professionals in the development, deployment, and sustainability of organizational engagement strategies, particularly among the Latino population. Three recommendations for action include: a) focus on selecting the right organizational leaders, b) provide leaders with training and development to support engagement efforts, and c) hold leaders accountable for the engagement of those they lead. Further research could include research on various cultural groups and organizations and quantitative analysis of potential cultural antecedents of engagement.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The topic of employee engagement has grown in relevance over the past 25 years, and researchers have explored its various dimensions. In their research on engagement, Saks and Gruman (2014), Albrecht, Bakker, Gruman, Macey, and Saks (2015), and Shuck, Adelson, and Reio (2017), concluded few leadership topics had received as much interest among academics and practitioners as employee engagement. Similarly, in their research on understanding, measuring and increasing engagement, Gallup (2017) proposed several challenges organizational leaders face as they tackle engagement efforts: globalization, limited resources, and increased quality, productivity, and performance demands. Furthermore, in their study on employee engagement and international business, Eswaranathan, Samie, and Murugasu (2014) concluded increasing global challenges and complexity had elevated demands on organizational leadership to consider innovative approaches to growth, sustainability, and competency-based models. Meanwhile, investment in employee engagement has surfaced as a viable approach to boosting organizational performance. In their research on leadership and engagement, Cheema, Akram, and Javed (2015) and Gallup (2017) found that organizations are changing at a faster pace than ever before, requiring forward-thinking and visionary leadership approaches. In their exploration of antecedents to engagement, Shuck, Reio, and Rocco (2011) and Bailey, Madden, Alfes, and Fletcher (2017) concluded practitioners and scholars agree, while there is still much research to be done on the topic, there is an excellent value in understanding drivers of engagement, and applying that knowledge to implement strategic engagement initiatives.

High levels of employee engagement contribute to favorable organizational performance. In a study on engagement in the U.S. workforce, Gallup (2017) found that engagement is a crucial driver of productivity, retention, customer loyalty, shareholder, and internal/external stakeholder value. Similarly, in their analyses on satisfaction, employee engagement and business outcomes, several researchers, including Albrecht, Bakker, Gruman, Macey, and Saks (2015), concluded that engagement is also a contributor to organizational competitive advantage. In their research on job demands and resources relative to work engagement, Bakker and Demerouti (2014) found a connection between the performance of engaged workers to positive emotions, good health (less psychosomatic complaints), ability to mobilize personal and job resources, crossover engagement, and emotional contagion. In their studies on engagement, researchers such as Allen and Turner (2017) and Shuck, Alagaraja, Rose, and Owen (2017), determined high levels of employee engagement are associated with positive individual health metrics. Furthermore, in his research on drivers of employee engagement, Antony (2018) linked employee engagement several positive outcomes, including organizational productivity, retention, reduced absenteeism, favorable word of mouth, and employee loyalty.

Over the past few decades, researchers have conducted numerous quantitative and qualitative studies on engagement; their findings around the importance and value of the topic have established a foundation for additional research and scholarly discourse. Engagement has implications for many areas, including organizational growth, training and development, performance management, corporate planning, and strategic change initiatives (Gallup, 2017). In their research on leadership and engagement outcomes,

Radda, Majidai and Akanno (2015) found that challenges of engagement increase among remote and digital organizations, where physical or perceived distance makes connecting and engagement all the more critical. In their review of the state of the American Workforce, Gallup (2017) concluded employee wants and needs, and trends in millennial engagement are presenting a risk to organizations who fail to recognize the consequences of disengagement. Because engaged employees perform at a higher level, and contribute to overall organizational performance, the topic has gained growing interest internationally among human resources professionals and senior leadership (Shuck, Reio, & Rocco, 2011). A greater understanding of unique drivers of engagement may help organizational leaders to be more effective in their efforts.

Study Background/Foundation

Workforce composition has changed significantly over the years, and with this change, the need to explore organizational strategy and workplace engagement has arisen. In their research on employee engagement and autoethnography, Sambrook, Jones, and Doloriert (2014) found that cross-cultural research on culture-specific antecedents for engagement is beneficial for multinational organizations, with potential to inform policy and procedure at public and private institutions. Furthermore, in their engagement research, Shuck, Reio, and Rocco (2011) emphasized the importance of exploring and understanding cultural variables concerning employee engagement, concluding greater understanding of these antecedent variables may prove beneficial for international or diverse organizations. A rapid change in workforce composition makes consideration of demographics in engagement approaches all the more essential.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the Latino population is projected to be the third fastest-growing minority group in the United States. In their research conducted on U.S. demographics, Colby and Ortman (2015) found that the Latino population is expected to reach over 25% of the United States population by 2060. In 2011, the Latino population represented about 15% of the United States workforce, and this number is expected to reach 18% by 2018 (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2015). The Latino population represents the largest minority group of employees in the United States (Frey, 2015). In their research on Latino civic participation and demographics in the United States, Bell (2016) concluded that the growing Latino population would increasingly shape democracy in the United States over the next century. Furthermore, as the U.S.' largest immigrant minority group, Vidal (2018), in his research on Latino immigrant participation in U.S. politics, found that Latino immigrants are a noteworthy population in the United States, as they have an increasing influence on demographic, economic, and political constructs.

Theoretical and conceptual references to employee engagement are abundant in academic research, strategy, and application. In their study, Saks and Gruman (2014) addressed gaps in contemporary research, noting a growing need for empirical data to support and substantiate prescriptive recommendations for boosting engagement levels across a broad scope of industries and circumstances. While current research on employee engagement is rooted primarily in theoretical psychological frameworks, additional research should include an investigation into complex and diverse perspectives on organizational sociology and employee behaviors.

Antecedents to Engagement

A review of the literature reveals a vast number of potential precursors to employee engagement. Several researchers, including Shuck and Wollard (2011) and Bailey, Madden, Alfes, and Fletcher (2017), made important contributions to the literature through their research on engagement antecedents. Through their comprehensive literature review of 265 articles, Shuck and Wollard (2011) compiled an extensive list of over 42 potential antecedents to employee engagement. Similarly, Bailey et al. (2017) examined 214 studies to uncover meaning, explore antecedents, and synthesize engagement outcomes. In additional research on engagement drivers, Bakker, Demerouti, and Sanz-Vergel (2014) concluded that these variables may include, but are not limited to: job fit, affective commitment, psychological climate, job satisfaction, work environment, trust, reward and recognition, organizational identification, transformational and authentic leadership, training and development, job demands and resources, role clarity, performance management, organizational support, and procedural and distributive justice.

Deficiencies in the Evidence

While several researchers have evaluated the relationship between age and engagement, and between gender and engagement, there is a deficiency of research on engagement and cultural constructs. Engagement levels may vary based on age, gender, income level, and other similar factors. Kulik, Perera, and Cregan (2016) addressed this in their research on the aging global workforce, suggesting organizational leaders have been slow to address the transforming workplace dynamics and engagement needs which accompany them. In relevant research on age and engagement, Kim and Kang (2017)

suggested that an aging demographic may inherently have higher levels of engagement due to well-regulated emotions and stronger ability to nurture workplace relationships. Nuances of the global component of the workforce are underrepresented in the engagement literature; however, Avery, McKay, and Wilson (2007) shed light on diversity and dissimilarity. Their research focused on exploring age and the relational gap through the filter of social identity and self-categorization theories, whereby individuals may self-identify based on many different demographic characteristics, including age, race, gender, or national origin. They also concluded that age is secondary to race as a demographic component relative to social network uniformity. A threat to social identity may be dissimilarity to one's coworkers, resulting in coping through physical or psychological withdrawal or disengagement (Avery et al., 2007). The gaps in research indicate there is an opportunity to explore the various dimensions of employee engagement further.

The research on age dissimilarity is a foundation for further exploration of difference, psychological withdrawal, and cultural self-identification relative to employee engagement. In their engagement research on antecedent and outcome variables related to employee engagement, Shuck, Reio, and Rocco (2011) concluded that international or diverse organizations might benefit from an exploration of cultural-specific variables. Green (2017) researched the value of leadership adaptation versus authenticity and found that intercultural encounters in the workplace are more effective when the leader modifies their behaviors based on the collective interests of those they lead. An understanding of nuances specific to the cultural identity of individual workplace associates could help improve the efficacy of leadership and employee engagement strategies. Organizations

are becoming more global and require a unique understanding of how cultural contexts

may impact employee engagement strategies. Finally, in her study on employee

engagement relative to diversity and inclusion, Pleasant (2017) found that sociopolitical

tensions spilling into the workplace, coupled with increasing social identity diversity, has

made a reflection on HR practices relative to engagement efforts all the more critical for

ensuring organizational competitive advantage and growth.

The cross-cultural research presents a unique challenge in that comparisons may

be inappropriate or misguided. In an article addressing research instruments across

geographic lines, Chen (2008) concluded there is potential for measurement invariance

due to differing constructs; constructs may vary substantially from one culture to the

next, as meanings and definitions do not always overlap. Furthermore, while many

researchers have applied merely one research instrument (typically created in a Western

country) to another country or cultural setting, there is inherent variability possible with

language translation or different reference framework (i.e., social, political, religious

factors). Chen (2008) also concluded that culture affects people in many ways, including

basic psychological domains, reasoning, self-concept, and relational interactions. One

example provided is the difference in how individuals perceived a sense of self.

Individuals from the United States and other Western countries tend to derive self-esteem

from personal contributions and achievements, while individuals from Eastern cultures

align their concept of "self" with interdependence and deep connection to family, friends,

and coworkers (Chen, 2008). Hofstede's (1980, 2015) research and emerging cultural

dimension theory reinforce the prominence of social identity in how individuals engage

with those around them. Researchers who fail to consider inherent gaps in self-

conceptualization and measurement tools across cultural lines may produce misguided results.

The workforce landscape is changing quickly. Globalization, virtual collaboration, changing demographics, and increased competition have challenged organizational leaders with unique and evolving considerations for workplace engagement (Gallup, 2017). Meanwhile, in the United States, the Latino population is multiplying. Gallup (2017) noted that employee engagement levels had not risen overall since they began measuring the construct globally and across multiple industries in 2000. As traditional employee engagement strategies do not leverage cultural constructs, an understanding of Latino cultural values and antecedents to engagement may be a viable approach for informing engagement strategies of the future.

Problem Statement

An absence of effective engagement strategies can be costly to an organization. In their research on the worker-engagement gap in the United States, Shuck, Reio, and Rocco (2011) estimated that disengaged employees cost approximately $250-$300 billion annually. Gallup (2017) calculated that this loss in productivity averages $483-$605 billion annually. Consequently, in their article on employee engagement and HR best practices, Albrecht, Bakker, Gruman, Macey, and Saks (2015) shared recommendations for increasing employee engagement outcomes through the adoption of best practices in talent selection, performance management, and training and development. In their article on the importance of effective diversity training, Lindsey, King, Hebl, and Levine (2015) concluded that organizational diversity had increased significantly over the past 50 years, where more and more leaders and employees are required to interact with people who are

different than they are; recognition of this nuance is vital for establishing clear methods to accomplish organizational goals.

The general problem is that traditional employee engagement models are failing. Wagner (2015) indicated that one reason for this failure might be the implementation of broad organizational engagement measures and one-size-fits-all strategies. In studies on failed employee engagement efforts, Guaspari (2015) and Gallup (2017) concluded that despite ongoing corporate efforts to drive engagement levels, a majority of employees are still not engaged. In their engagement research, Shuck, Reio, and Rocco (2011) found that as North American organizations have rapidly become more global in scope, human resource leaders must understand how the changing workplace dynamic may impact employee perception of engagement and effectiveness of strategies.

Specific Problem

The specific leadership problem is that often, human resources leaders do not consider individual drivers of engagement when developing and implementing organizational engagement strategies. In research addressing one-size-fits-all engagement approaches, Wagner (2015) found that organizational leaders fail to understand that each employee should be managed, developed, coached and engaged individually, as people of varying race, gender, and age are more different then they are similar. Additionally, the widening disengagement gap in the workplace, coupled with increasing diversity, indicate the potential for unrealized opportunity to narrow the gap through greater understanding and application of culture-specific antecedents to engagement (Shuck, Reio & Rocco, 2011). Wagner (2015) also determined that traditional employee engagement approaches have yielded poor results.

Human resources leaders play a critical role in the leadership and implementation of organizational engagement strategies. In their article on antecedent and outcome variables of employee engagement, Shuck, Reio, and Rocco (2011) emphasized the value of human resources (HR) leaders as drivers of organizational engagement strategies. In additional employee engagement research, Albrecht, Bakker, Gruman, Macey, and Saks (2015) reinforced the responsibility HR leaders have in contributing to organizational growth and sustainability through creation and sustainment of workplace engagement programs. Managers should recognize that many variables, including age and gender, have an impact on employee experiences in the workplace (Gallup, 2017). Wagner (2015) concluded there are a vast number of different actions, attitudes, or practices which may impact how individuals experience engagement in the workplace; however, leaders often fail to recognize these differences and apply them to engagement strategies.

The focus of this qualitative phenomenological study is an exploration of the role of cultural values in shaping the attitudes, beliefs, and work experiences of Latinos employed at a major global specialty retailer. The human resources leaders in the organization did not leverage individual drivers of engagement to develop, measure, and implement engagement strategies. Instead, a routine quarterly surveyed was deployed to measure engagement levels. The *Global Pulse Survey* measured the results of a single question across the global population of corporate employees: "*Have you had a meaningful conversation with your supervisor in the past 90 days*?"

In an article on measures of engagement, Hills (2018) challenged the effectiveness of measuring engagement via structured and uniform survey questions; there is a vast number of different actions, attitudes, or practices which may impact how

individuals experience engagement in the workplace. Furthermore, she cautioned against poor survey design, warning that poorly crafted questions or timing may exacerbate existing feelings of negative engagement. Engagement levels vary among organizations and workgroups, and there are several factors which can affect engagement, including the length of tenure, industry, specific occupation, age, education, and gender (Gallup, 2017). The results of this qualitative study provide valuable insights for executive leaders and human resources professionals at the organization, to improve employee engagement levels among this population. The study also provides insight into the role cultural values play among other communities and produce momentum for considering alternatives to mainstream one-size-fits-all engagement strategies.

Audience

The audience for this research includes human resources and organizational leaders, practitioners, and consultants of organizational strategy and employee engagement approaches. Several researchers, such as Guaspari (2015), and Sambrook, Jones, and Doloriert (2014), substantiate the fact that cultural contexts should be a consideration for revising or tailoring mainstream engagement strategies for driving employee engagement and subsequent organizational performance. Developers of engagement strategies, leaders of implementation, and scholars of organizational leadership may find interest in the research herein, an exploration of Latino perspectives and lived experiences of employee engagement.

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Purpose of the Study

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The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the role of cultural values in shaping the attitudes, beliefs, and work experiences of Latinos

employed at a major global specialty retailer. The results of the study may provide new and useful information for executive leaders and human resources professionals in the development, deployment, and sustainability of organizational engagement strategies. In their engagement research, Shuck and Wollard (2011) found that awareness of potential culture-specific drivers or antecedents of engagement may equip practitioners to improve leadership efficacy, enhance cultural awareness in an increasingly global workforce, and drive organizational performance and sustainability. This study should provide new information and considerations on how to increase employee engagement levels of Latino employees in this organization, to improve individual and organizational performance and retention levels. The study may also shed light on how to improve employee engagement on a larger scale, through a focused understanding of the role cultural values may have on employee engagement experiences of individual workplace associates.

Methodology Overview

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the role of cultural values in shaping the attitudes, beliefs, and work experiences of Latinos employed at a major global specialty retailer. Defining best practices for qualitative research, Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested qualitative research is by nature exploratory and textural. Qualitative phenomenological research methods were selected to support the exploratory nature of the topic. In outlining recommendations for crafting phenomenological research, Vagle (2014) described phenomenology as an encounter, a craft, and a way of living; it is the study of phenomena, more specifically the way people interact with one another and the things or events occurring around them. The findings from this study may contribute to the evolution of the dialogue on employee engagement

with regards to Latino cultural values and employee engagement. The researcher engaged in open-ended semi-structured interviews of Latinos employed at a major global specialty retailer. Specific to data and research methods, Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Vagle (2014) concluded that interviews are a valuable and rigorous research instrument among qualitative researchers for fostering openness, dialogue, and conversational tone. The specific interview questions and protocol are in Appendix C and Appendix D, respectively.

For this study, the researcher used convenience sampling for participant selection. The participants were selected via email recruitment of the researcher's contacts and through personal networking in the organization. To be chosen to participate in the research, the participants had to be employed by the organization, self-identify as first-generation immigrant Latino, and be willing to participate in a 30-to-45-minute interview and one subsequent follow-up conversation or email if needed. The following qualitative research best practices identified by Creswell and Creswell (2018)) were utilized: audio recording and transcription for data analysis, use of a research journal for researcher reflection and minimal note taking during the interview process, and assignment of a pseudonym to each participant. In alignment with Vagle's (2014) recommendations for qualitative research, the researcher coded the interview data by hand and compiled a structured thematic analysis.

Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the role of cultural values in shaping the attitudes, beliefs, and work experiences of Latinos employed at a major global specialty retailer. The researcher chose to study Latinos

because of their impact and growing population in the U.S. workforce and to address the fact that leaders are not considering this specific population when developing their engagement strategies. The particular retailer was chosen for the research because engagement levels in service industries had been historically lagging behind engagement levels in other sectors (Gallup, 2017), and the organization employs thousands of employees in the United States and across the globe. The following questions guided the researcher:

1. How do Latino employees at a major global specialty retailer define employee engagement?

2. How do Latino employees at a major global specialty retailer describe their personal employee engagement experiences?

3. What do Latino employees at a major global specialty retailer perceive to be effective and meaningful drivers of employee engagement?

Study Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations of this study included the potential for researcher bias and the use of convenience sampling for data collection. As outlined in the methodology, participants were recruited via personal organizational contacts, and through internal networking. As a result, the researcher had varying degrees of familiarity with about 50% of the participants. Data were limited to transcripts from open-ended interviews, which are not designed to be all-inclusive or all-compassing regarding employee engagement or Latino culture. In their article on Latino-American and Anglo-American cultural values and job preferences, Stone, Johnson, Stone-Romero, and Hartman (2006) found that there are also differences in cultural values among those who identify as Latino. In their study,

however, they did not identify potential variances among the Latino population subgroups. The study findings may have been impacted by fluency in the English language; according to Guerrero and Posthuma (2014), first-generation Latino employees are more likely to have difficulty with communication and concept translation. Additional limitations included time constraints; the research was completed between September and November 2017.

Boundaries included the inclusion of only first-generation Latino participants for the research which was necessary due to the scope of potential research and data available on the topic. This boundary was also related to the desire to gain additional insight into this specific population, with regards to cultural antecedents of employee engagement. The research was limited to one particular organization, specific research questions outlined herein, and the philosophical framework as the foundation for the research methodology.

Definitions of Key Terms

Given the number of articles written about employee engagement and the different definitions and perspectives on relative terms, definitions help create a common point of reference. While there may be many different ways to define the following concepts, this section defines terms commonly used throughout this study.

Antecedents of Engagement. Antecedents are enablers to or conditions which support employee engagement. In their research on antecedents and outcome variables, Shuck and Wollard (2011) found that antecedents include "constructs, strategies, or conditions" that enable engagement and exist in organizations which reap the benefits of employee engagement (p. 434).

Culture. Culture is a shared set of values among a group of individuals. Hofstede (2015) defined culture as "a system of shared values, rules, norms and institutions, most of them unconscious and unwritten, socially transmitted, regulating the social lives of groups" (p.548). Furthermore, Hofstede concluded that researchers could explore culture from multiple reference points, including ethics, country, religion, value, and language.

Disengaged Employees. "Actively disengaged employees aren't just unhappy at work; they're busy acting out their unhappiness. Every day, these workers undermine what their engaged coworkers accomplish" (Reilly, 2014, p.1). Disengaged employees harm workplace culture and productivity.

Employee Engagement. While many definitions of employee engagement have emerged over the years, researchers such as Bailey, Madden, Alfes, and Fletcher (2017) Kumar (2015), and Eswaranathan, Samie, and Murugasu (2014), concluded that there remains a lack of consensus on an all-inclusive definition of engagement, and precisely how to measure it. The following working definition of engagement, developed by Shuck, Osam, Zigarmi, and Nimon (2017), was used for this study: "a positive, active, work-related psychological state operationalized by the maintenance, intensity, and direction of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral energy" (p.269). Reilly (2014) reinforced that engaged employees are passionate and feel a strong connection to the workplace, resulting in innovation and organizational progress.

First Generation Immigrants. First generation refers to Latinos who are foreign-born. This nuance is relevant to the research, as Latinos who are born in the United States are more likely to experience assimilation of Anglo-American cultural values (Guerrero & Posthuma, 2014).

Latino. Latino is an inclusive term used to identify individuals who are from the following countries: Mexico, the Caribbean, Central, and South America, or individuals who trace their origins to Spain or Spanish-speaking countries (Stone, Johnson, Stone-Romero & Hartman, 2006).

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the role of cultural values in shaping the attitudes, beliefs, and work experiences of Latinos employed at a major global specialty retailer. More effective engagement strategies may help resolve the struggle leaders have in connecting with employees of this cultural background to improve engagement and drive organizational performance and retention levels. Researchers, such as Bailey, Madden, Alfes, and Fletcher (2017) and Shuck and Wollard (2011), found that organizational leaders who recognize the possible antecedents of employee engagement will develop more credible and viable engagement strategies, with specific and measurable outcomes. Furthermore, Guaspari (2015) suggested an awareness of the culture-specific drivers of engagement may prove to be a valuable component for driving effective leadership, global organizational performance and sustainability.

The following chapter will provide a holistic review of relevant literature on the topic, combining a synthesis of both seminal and contemporary literature. Psychology and management literature are merged with cross-cultural research to develop a foundational understanding of the current state of the literature, and the synthesis provides support for the present study, as well as considerations for future research on employee engagement.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee engagement drives individual productivity, organizational performance, talent retention, customer loyalty, and profitability. Several researchers have commented on these aspects, including Kumar (2015) who found that engaged employees are more enthusiastic about delivering quality products and services, positively impacting sales, customer loyalty, and the bottom line. Similarly, in their research on engagement and leadership, Radda, Majidadi, and Akanno (2015) concluded that engaged employees drive individual and organizational performance outcomes and retention. Furthermore, Shuck, Reio, and Rocco (2011) and Gallup (2017) linked engagement to higher levels of discretionary effort and employee retention. In their ongoing research on job demands and resources relative to employee engagement, Bakker, Demerouti, and Sanz-Vergel (2014) found highly engaged employees feel a sense of connectivity to their organization, and perform better because of positive emotions, ability to mobilize personal and job resources, crossover engagement, and emotional contagion. Also, Gallup (2017) researchers concluded that engaged employees are in better health, contributing to organizational performance through a better overall sense of well-being and fewer work days missed due to illness. Employee engagement is relevant in the literature on organizational leadership and sustainability, as engaged employees are a source of organizational competitive advantage.

Leadership is the primary driver of employee engagement. Over the past few decades, quantitative and qualitative researchers have substantiated the connection of employee engagement to organizational leadership. Radda, Majidadi, and Akanno (2015) found that strong leaders are competent in strategic planning, risk management, tech-

savvy, interpersonal skills, critical thinking combined with an ability to make quick decisions, and cross-cultural abilities. In their review of the employee engagement literature, Shuck and Wollard (2011) found that engagement has implications for many areas: organizational growth, training and development, performance management, organizational planning, and strategic change initiatives. Because engaged employees perform at a higher level, the topic has gained growing interest internationally among human resources professionals and senior leadership.

Despite growing interest and focus on employee engagement across multiple organizations and industries, improvement in measured engagement levels continues to be an area of opportunity. Gallup (2017) concluded that workplace engagement levels have not significantly increased since 2000 when researchers began gathering and compiling extensive industry data. The absence of effective engagement strategies can be costly to an organization. Gallup (2017) found that the annual productivity loss due to active employee disengagement in the United States is $400-$600 billion annually. In their research on underlying mechanisms which contribute to engagement, Hansen, Byrne, and Kiersch (2014) confirmed developed interpersonal skills of organizational leaders is critical to positive employee engagement outcomes. Due to the magnitude of influence employee engagement levels have on organizational performance, leaders should be keenly aware of engagement factors and outcomes.

North American organizations have rapidly become more global in scope, with increased complexity and diversity. Shuck, Reio, and Rocco (2011) suggested that human resources leaders must understand how the changing workplace dynamic may impact employee perception of engagement and effectiveness of strategies. They also concluded

that a greater understanding of cultural variables relative to employee engagement could prove beneficial for organizations across the globe, those with growing multicultural diversity, or North American companies with an international presence. Furthermore, in their research on effective diversity training, Lindsey, King, Hebl, and Levine (2015) found that rapidly growing workplace diversity has made a leadership focus on prejudice, empathy, and improved training on dissimilarity essential for achieving organizational goals and sustained growth. In additional research on cultural variables for employee engagement, Conboy and Yoon (2016) determined global organizations need to develop and expand their employee engagement policies and practices in response to cultural, economic, and political diversity. Increasingly dynamic and workplace environments signal a need to consider engagement strategies through a new and innovative lens.

The shift in workplace composition is particularly impactful when considering rapidly changing employee demographics in the United States. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the Latino population is projected to be the third fastest-growing minority group in the United States; furthermore, by 2060, the Latino population is expected to reach over 25% of the United States population (Colby & Ortman, 2015). In 2015, the Hispanic/Latino population represented about 16.4% of the United States workforce, and this number is expected to reach 18% by 2018 (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2015). In their evaluation of indicators of immigrant engagement and Latino civic participation, Bell (2016) found that Latino immigrants are an important population, as they have an increasing influence on demographic, economic, and political constructs. Their power will increasingly shape democracy in the United States over the next century.

Problem Statement

The absence of effective engagement strategies can be costly to an organization. In their research on the worker-engagement gap in the United States, Shuck, Reio, and Rocco (2011) estimated that disengaged employees cost approximately $250-$300 billion annually. More recently, Gallup (2017) indicated that this loss in productivity averages $400-$600 billion annually. Consequently, the topic of employee engagement has begun to interest many human resources and executive leaders, as investment and success in this area can prove mutually beneficial for organizational performance and individual well-being (Albrecht, Bakker, Gruman, Macey, & Saks, 2015). In their research on effective diversity training, Lindsey, King, Hebl, and Levine (2015) found that rapidly growing workplace diversity has made a leadership focus on prejudice, empathy, and improved training on dissimilarity essential for achieving organizational goals and sustained growth. As North American organizations have rapidly become more global in scope, human resource leaders must understand how the changing workplace dynamic may impact employee perception of engagement and effectiveness of strategies.

The general problem is that traditional employee engagement models are failing. Several researchers, including Gallup (2017) and Wagner (2015) concluded strategies which depend upon broad organizational measures and one-size-fits-all approaches are ineffective in improving employee engagement results. In researching the failure of engagement strategies, Guaspari (2015) and Gallup (2017) found that despite ongoing organizational efforts to drive engagement levels, a majority of employees are still not engaged. Similarly, Gallup (2017) found that while some industries have recognized

gains in engagement levels since 2009, the customer-facing service industry had an overall drop.

Specific Problem

The specific leadership problem is that often, human resources leaders do not consider individual drivers of engagement when developing and implementing organizational engagement strategies. In proposing more effective methods for employee engagement, Wagner (2015) concluded that many organizational leaders fail to understand that employees should be managed, developed, coached and engaged individually, as people of varying race, gender, and age, are more different then they are similar. Additionally, Shuck, Reio, and Rocco (2011) found that the widening disengagement gap in the workplace, coupled with increasing diversity, indicate unrealized opportunity to narrow the gap through a greater understanding and application of culture-specific antecedents to engagement. Organizational adoption of one-size-fits-all approaches has yielded poor results.

Human resources (HR) leaders are responsible for contributing to organizational growth and sustainability. In exploring employee engagement frameworks, several researchers, including Albrecht, Bakker, Gruman, Macey, and Saks (2015) and Eswaranathan, Samie, and Murugasu (2014), found that HR leaders should focus on leadership learning and development and the achievement of high levels of managerial competencies for effective employee engagement processes. Similarly, Wagner (2015) concluded there is a vast number of different actions, attitudes, or practices which may impact how individuals experience engagement in the workplace; however, most leaders fail to recognize these differences and apply them to engagement strategies. Similarly,

Albrecht, Bakker, Gruman, Macey, and Saks (2015) emphasized the value of HR leaders as drivers of successful organizational engagement strategies. Program leaders should recognize that multiple variables, including age and gender, have an impact on employee experiences in the workplace (Gallup, 2017). HR leaders have a weighty influence on organizational culture and implementation of engagement strategies.

North American organizations have rapidly become more global in scope. In assessing the effectiveness of organizational engagement approaches, Shuck, Reio, and Rocco (2011) concluded that leaders must understand how rapidly changing workplace dynamics may impact employee perceptions of individual meaning and engagement. Gallup (2017) found that engagement levels vary among organizations and workgroups, and there are several factors which may impact engagement, including the length of tenure, industry, specific occupation, age, education, and gender. The researcher for this qualitative phenomenological study specifically explored the role of cultural values in shaping the attitudes, beliefs, and work experiences of Latinos employed at a major global specialty retailer. The results of the study provide valuable context for executive leaders and human resources professionals, to improve employee engagement levels among this population. Also, there are useful insights into the role cultural values play among other communities to produce momentum for considering alternatives to mainstream one-size-fits-all engagement strategies.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the role of cultural values in shaping the attitudes, beliefs, and work experiences of Latinos employed at a major global specialty retailer. The results of the study provide new and useful information for executive leaders and human resources professionals in the

development, deployment, and sustainability of organizational engagement strategies. In

their article on drivers of employee engagement, Shuck and Wollard (2011) found that

awareness of potential culture-specific antecedents of engagement may equip

practitioners to improve leadership efficacy, enhance cultural awareness in an

increasingly global workforce, and drive organizational performance and sustainability.

The results of this research may also shed light on how to increase employee engagement

levels of Latino employees in this organization, to improve individual and organizational

performance and retention levels. Hispanic/Latino employees represent approximately

17% of the United States retail workforce overall (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015). As

such, this study also sheds light on how to improve employee engagement on a larger

scale, through a focused understanding of the role cultural values may have on employee

engagement experiences of individual workplace associates.

Study Background/Foundation

Recently, researchers have explored the various complexities inherent to

engagement theory, including antecedents of engagement. In their research on work

engagement, Bakker, Demerouti, and Sanz-Vergel (2014) found that personal and job

resources are the primary predictors of employee engagement. Furthermore, they

reinforced the importance of resources and demands relative to engagement, suggesting

that limited resources with high demands contributes to higher levels of burnout and

lower levels of engagement. In a structured and extensive literature review, Shuck and

Wollard (2011) compiled a comprehensive list of potential antecedents through their

synthesis of 265 articles on employee engagement. They concluded antecedent variables

of engagement might include, but are not limited to: job fit, affective commitment,

psychological climate, job satisfaction, work environment, trust, reward and recognition, organizational identification, transformational and authentic leadership, training and development, job demands and resources, clear expectations and performance management, perceived organizational support, and procedural and distributive justice. There is an abundant amount of research dedicated to exploring potential drivers of engagement.

Workforce composition has changed substantially over the years. In their research addressing engagement and mature-age workers, Kulik, Perera, and Cregan (2016) found that this change comes with the need to explore evolution in organizational workplace engagement strategies. Also, Guaspari (2015) concluded that cross-cultural research which examines culture-specific antecedents for engagement is beneficial for multinational organizations, helping inform policy and procedure at public and private institutions. In the United States, the Latino population represents the highest minority group of employees (Frey, 2015). Sandoval and Jennings (2012) found that emerging Latino populations in the Midwest have challenged traditional demographic maps, as Latino population growth outside states like Texas and California have accelerated in recent years. They also concluded Latinos who settle in the Midwestern portion of the United States are likely to encounter limited access to culturally and linguistically accommodating resources and overall limited understanding of Latino culture and language by the majority population.

The proceeding sections of this literature review provide additional context and justification for research on this problem. A synthesis of seminal and contemporary management literature substantiates the critical role of leadership in driving

organizational growth and sustainability, with a focus on interpersonal skills, authenticity, and transformational leadership approaches. Next, a review of the psychology literature provides an understanding of the foundational psychological constructs relative to employee engagement, and the evolution and interplay of related concepts over time. Finally, a review of the literature related to cultural considerations and employee engagement provides background on, and justification for, understanding and application of culture-specific drivers of engagement for development or improvement of organizational strategies, with a focus on Latino culture.

Management Literature

A key area of relevant literature is the seminal and contemporary research on management systems and leadership. Deming's 1986 book, *Out of the Crisis,* was written in response to a significant shift in the industry and the American workforce. He outlined 14 management principles for driving productivity, sustainability, and organizational performance, with a specific focus on the following themes:

- Competitive edge;

- Constant improvement and change leadership;

- Excellent quality of products/services;

- Vendor loyalty and trust;

- Ongoing training;

- Driving out fear among workers;

- Collaboration among individuals and teams;

- Leadership and empowerment of individual workers;

- Instilling pride in a job well done;

- Encouraging everyone to be part of organizational improvement and transformation.

One of Deming's core beliefs was that individual welfare of employees has a direct correlation to organizational quality and performance outcomes. His study of Japanese corporations reinforced his idea that emotional connectivity and understanding of human behaviors are critical for organizational performance and sustainability.

In more recent years, the Gallup organization has been highly influential in the development of employee engagement concepts and best practices. In her book on understanding, measuring and leading engagement efforts, Bridger (2015) noted that Gallup's contributions in organizational leadership literature have been impactful through their development of a 12-question survey (Q12) to reflect key measures of employee engagement. Many researchers refer to the engagement research completed by Gallup over the past few decades as a foundation for additional inquiry; their extensive studies on the topic have earned Gallup researchers' recognition and credibility in the field. The Gallup organization began consistently measuring employee engagement levels across industries and organizations in the year 2000, utilizing the data to understand trends, indicators, and antecedents of engagement, and efficacy of organizational strategies to drive engagement (2017). Their research has been influential over the past few decades, raising awareness on employee engagement and linking outcomes to organizational performance.

Few management concepts have received as much attention and focus in recent literature as employee engagement. In recent research on management principles and processes, Medlin and Green (2014) reinforced that foundational leadership behaviors

and principles have a positive impact on organizational engagement levels. In their study on the effects of basic management fundamentals on employee engagement, they noted several relevant antecedent variables on employee engagement. These constructs include regular objective-setting conversations, provision of tools and resources necessary for completion of objectives, and ongoing performance conversations to calibrate progress against targets.

Performance management is a viable option for increasing worker engagement, and there are some specific action steps which can be implemented to improve engagement levels. In their research on improving engagement through performance management, Albrecht, Bakker, Gruman, Macey, and Saks (2015) concluded these steps may include objective setting and establishment of developmental goals, a culture of authentic and ongoing feedback and recognition, consistent and frequent performance appraisals, and intentional steps to foster a climate of trust and empowerment. Bailey, Madden, Alfes, and Fletcher (2017) reinforced this in their research on antecedent variables of employee engagement, concluding that developmental feedback and leadership authenticity is essential to increase engagement levels. Furthermore, in an article on employee engagement and HR best practices, Albrecht, Bakker, Gruman, Macey, and Saks (2015) recommended focusing on learning and development and training to improve organizational engagement levels. Several management behaviors and processes are connected to employee engagement.

Leadership Authenticity and Transformational Leadership

Leadership concepts and specific leadership behaviors relate to individual and organizational engagement. In their study on interpersonal leadership and employee

engagement, Hansen, Byrne, and Kiersch (2014) found that leadership behaviors impact engagement, however, how they influence engagement remains under-researched in the academic literature. Similarly, in their research on authentic behaviors and employee engagement, Reis, Trullen, and Story (2016) concluded that there is a relationship between high levels of authentic behaviors and engagement, individual productivity, and psychological well-being. In an article on engagement and the relationship between leader and follower, Xu and Helena (2011) found that psychological safety, leadership transparency, trust, and support, have strong connections to employee engagement levels. In a similar article on the same topic, Breevaart, Bakker, Hetland, Demerouti, Olsen, and Espevik (2014) concluded transformational leadership behaviors contribute to daily work engagement levels much more than transactional leadership behaviors. Finally, in their study on daily job demands and engagement levels, Breevaart and Bakker (2018) concluded there is an important relationship between transformational leadership behaviors, job demands, and employee engagement.

For their quantitative case study, Xu and Helena (2011) used an online survey method to gather responses from employees at a New Zealand insurance firm. They used an eight-point Likert Scale and a 360-degree feedback mechanism to test their multiple hypotheses on different aspects of leadership and engagement. While most of their hypotheses were partially substantiated, they concluded there is a need for more evidence and longitudinal data to uncover potential causality with regards to the relationship between leadership and engagement. These traits relate to transformational leadership theory, with a focus on daily leadership behaviors as high impact drivers of employee engagement outcomes (Breevaart, Bakker, Hetland, Demerouti, Olsen, & Espevik, 2014).

In recent research on the state of the American workforce, Gallup (2017) found that leadership authenticity fosters work engagement, which promotes job satisfaction and discretionary effort in the workplace. Coupled with limited resources and stressful work environments, employee engagement via leadership authenticity has become critical.

Growing organizational complexity and resourcing challenges have made the value of engagement and leadership authenticity all the more prevalent. Research on leadership authenticity and employee workplace behaviors conducted by Yan, Fuller, Hester, and Bennett (2018) substantiated the value of authentic leadership behaviors relative to employee engagement and three psychological constructs. In their quantitative analysis of both employees and leaders at large health organization, Yan et al. (2018) found that authentic leadership is positively associated with supervisor identification, psychological safety, and workplace engagement. Furthermore, based on their findings, they recommended organizational leaders place greater emphasis on selecting for and developing authentic leadership behaviors, to promote a culture where employees voluntarily expend discretionary effort. Limitations to their research included a small sample size, reducing the potential for statistical significance. In similar research, Hsieh and Wang (2015) found that the presence of authentic behaviors in leadership is essential for fostering an organization of mutual supervisor-employee authenticity, trust, and engagement.

Defining Employee Engagement

There is no single definition of employee engagement. Definitions vary among industries, organizations, and geographies, but common themes have emerged to substantiate engagement as a positive construct within the workplace (Bridger, 2015). In

their research on employee engagement, Eswaranathan, Samie, and Murugasu (2014)

defined an engaged employee as "one who is fully involved in, and enthusiastic about, his

or her work, and thus will act in a way that furthers their organization's interests" (p.71).

Several organizations simplify the concept, referring to engagement of the hearts and

minds of their employees, recognizing the unique relationship between cognitive and

emotional connection. Similarly, in an article on employee engagement concepts, Shuck,

Osam, Zigarmi, and Nimon (2017) developed a stand-alone employee engagement

definition as "a positive, active, work-related psychological state operationalized by the

maintenance, intensity, and direction of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral energy"

(p.269). Furthermore, Bailey, Madden, Alfes, and Fletcher (2017) found that the most

notable crossover of concepts in the literature exists between organizational commitment,

job satisfaction, and employee engagement. Other closely related concepts to employee

engagement include work engagement, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and

organizational citizenship behavior.

Psychology Literature

A foundational understanding of the psychology literature is essential to the

dialogue on an understanding of employee engagement. Tackling workplace engagement

is more than good management; it is about doing the hard work to understand each

person as an individual, instead of a cog in a machine (Guaspari, 2015). In *Widgets: The*

12 New Rules for Managing Employees as If they're Real People, Wagner (2015)

described this check-the-box leadership phenomenon, whereby leaders and human

resource practitioners begin to treat employees as *widgets*. He concluded that engagement

approaches should flex to individual motivations, abilities, personalities, and goals.

Engagement becomes complicated by the fact that it is an individual phenomenon, deeply personal and unique within a set of relationships and interactions.

A foundational psychological theoretical framework for engagement in the workplace surfaced in the early 90s. Kahn (1990) assessed engagement from a psychological perspective, exploring conditions which impact engagement and disengagement at work, as defined through three psychological components: *meaningfulness, safety,* and *availability*. Emotional, physical, and cognitive presence were core components of the theoretical framework in his early research on engagement. Kahn described personal engagement and disengagement relative to the "behaviors by which people bring in or leave out their personal selves during work role performances" (1990, p. 3). Through thematic analysis of the data, specific themes emerged to shape the discussion and subsequent definition of engagement and disengagement, Kahn (1990) conceptualized engagement as relating to attentiveness, absorption, involvement and expending additional physical, emotional or cognitive energy. He characterized disengagement as removal or withdrawal of self (physically, emotionally, or mentally), often coupled with the following emerging themes: burnout, apathy, personal uncoupling, effortless, closed, estranged, removal of self, suppression, and refraining from a personal investment of ideas or emotions.

Over the years, several academics have evolved the research on organizational commitment and definitions of employee engagement. In a synthesis of scholarly research through a psychology lens, Meyer and Allen (1991) advanced Kahn's theory through a three-component exploration of affective commitment (defined as emotional connectivity), outlining personal *desire, need* and *obligation* to maintain employment.

Their theoretical framework focused on affective commitment (defined as emotional connectivity) to the organization, measuring organizational commitment through the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ), designed to measure alignment and acceptance to the organization's missions and values, a perceived willingness to exert discretionary effort, and desire to stay with the organization (retention). Completing a review of several relevant studies, they were able to substantiate the correlation between organizational commitment and turnover rates further, concluding that affective (emotional) commitment had the highest correlation to individual performance in organizations. They also suggested there was an outstanding need for further research to explore organizational commitment and causal claims.

Additional research has advanced the understanding of employee engagement constructs. In his 24-item survey designed to measure vigor, dedication, and absorption, Schaufeli (2002) identified a strong correlation between vigor and absorption, whereby complete immersion corresponds with high levels of energy, and vice versa. He also revealed a high negative relationship between burnout and engagement. While Schaufeli illustrated some critical findings of burnout and engagement, he suggested that there was still substantial research to be done around the area of engagement, above and beyond the scope of burnout, and to include additional correlative and causal factors and their relationships to one another.

Only a few years later, May, Gilson, and Harter (2004) engaged in a field study to substantiate and refine Kahn's theoretical framework, with additional exploration of the relationship between engagement, meaningfulness, safety, and availability. Their research further developed the premise that individuals thrive in the workplace when they can

immerse themselves physically, emotionally and cognitively fully. Drawing from functionalist and humanistic paradigms, they referenced the prior literature around engagement embedded in the social sciences. Their quantitative study surveyed several employees of a large insurance organization in the Mid-West United States. Using a five-point Likert Scale, they developed questions to measure several hypotheses designed to explain the relationship between meaningfulness, safety, availability, and corresponding constructs (job enrichment, co-worker relations, work role, supervisor relations, co-worker relations, and co-worker norms, resources, self-consciousness, and outside activities). The results of their research supported Kahn's original theoretical framework, and also advanced more contemporary literature, with trustworthiness and perception of trust of supervisor and organization emerging as core components of engagement and concepts for future inquiry. No specific cultural implications emerged from their study.

As multiple scholars continued their research and extensive review of employee engagement, primary drivers of engagement began to surface with frequency in contemporary literature. Gallup (2017) concluded some of these drivers include trust and integrity, individual job fit, alignment between individual contributions and organizational performance, opportunities for career growth, pride in the organization, supportive and collaborative team members, development and enrichment opportunities, and relationship with a direct supervisor. Similarly, Gallup outlined the following themes from workplace opinion surveys which have been used over time to measure employee engagement levels: satisfaction with employer, overall job satisfaction, recognition and positive feedback, effort above and beyond the minimum, understanding the link between individual role and organizational mission/values, and intent to stay employed.

In their contribution to the engagement literature, Saks and Gruman (2014) confirmed the value of social exchange, social norms, and methods for building trust and partnership, justifying exploration of culture-specific considerations for these constructs. Furthermore, they advanced the definition of employee engagement through a synthesis of practitioner research and academic literature in the social sciences, distinguishing engagement from several other related and often overlapping constructs, such as organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), organizational commitment, and job involvement. Saks referenced two specific theoretical models as the platform for research on employee engagement: Kahn's psychological constructs of meaningfulness, availability, and safety, and Maslach's literature on burnout and job resources and demands. Furthermore, they made critical contributions to the engagement literature by substantiating the foundation of *social exchange theory.* Similarly, in their research on engagement, May, Gilson, and Harter (2004) confirmed that a foundation of trust and partnership are essential for driving employee engagement levels in organizations. The methods by which leaders foster trust and partnership, and their ability to do so, may vary based on individual social norms and self-identification.

Job Demands-Resources Model

The *job demands-resources* model differs from social-exchange theory, with a greater focus on resources and demands than social interaction in the workplace. In their research on demands and resources, Bakker and Demerouti (2014) used the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) to measure engagement levels, due to utilization across several countries, including China, Finland, Greece, Spain, and the Netherlands. They substantiated job resources (factors which reduce physiological and psychological costs,

stimulate growth and personal/professional development, help in the achievement of work goals) have a positive relationship with work engagement, and specific resources (performance feedback, social support, coaching) predict engagement. Furthermore, job resources are most relevant when employees face high demands in the workplace. In ongoing research on job demands, Bakker and Demerouti (2014) defined engagement in the context of positive organizational behavior (POB): high energy levels, mental resilience, significance, enthusiasm, fully concentrated and engrossed, attached, enthusiastic, and immersed.

Further research has supported the principles of the *job demands-resources model*. In their study of this model, Lu, Lu, Gursoy, and Neale (2016) substantiated the core tenets of the model, while fostering additional insights regarding role and engagement levels. Their study data validated engagement as a predictor of job satisfaction and turnover intentions, adding a new finding that supervisors have higher levels of engagement than front-line employees, with job satisfaction remaining constant. Furthermore, Lu et al. found that role modifies the relationship between absorption and satisfaction, recognizing increased absorption may not be a viable solution for improving supervisors' job satisfaction levels. While some researchers have explored employee engagement constructs in the hospitality industry, this literature contained new insights relative to supervisory demands, resources, engagement, and turnover intentions.

Not all research has aligned fully with the *job demands-resources model*. For instance, Vantilborgh, Bidee, Pepermans, Griep, and Hofmans (2016) critically assessed one aspect of the model, suggesting the existing literature does not explicitly distinguish factors which lead to the perception of psychological contract breach. They also

indicated that there was variability in mediating factors relative to both short term and long term outcomes. As expected, the results of their study confirmed the basic tenets of the *job demands-resources model*, whereby increased demands equal decreased engagement. Through their analysis, Vantilborgh et al. (2016) proposed a positive association between high job resources and low likelihood to report psychological contract breach due to positive affect; however, they also concluded that impact of negative affect was more complex and harder to define over periods. The *job demands-resources model* has been the foundation for a substantial amount of research on psychological constructs of engagement.

The more recent research on job demands and resources (JD-R) suggests the model has more relevance for application across different circumstances when demands clearly distinguish between hindrances and challenges. In their research on employee burnout and turnover intentions among Korean police officers, Yun, Hwang, and Lynch (2015) found that while many original constructs of the JD-R model were substantiated in their study, specific policies and work-family conflict emerged as mediating and variable factors across historical and cultural contexts. There may be value in exploring specific hindrances and challenges; these might relate to social exchanges and social norms, and the broader discussion herein on cultural considerations for engagement approaches. The gap in the literature that exists regarding cultural considerations substantiates the need to conduct additional research on engagement and meaning in the workplace relative to cultural constructs. Eldor and Vigoda-Gadot (2017) did more recent research on engagement and the employee-organization relationship, suggesting there may be more

differentiation between the concepts of employee engagement and psychological empowerment than previously thought.

Psychology of Latino Perceptions and Behaviors

Research findings specific to Latino perceptions, experiences and behaviors provide insight into additional considerations for employee engagement. Guerrero and Posthuma (2014) compiled a comprehensive literature review to understand Latino perceptions and behaviors in the workplace. Latino core values emerged as interpersonal exchanges, socio-emotional connectivity, job satisfaction, role clarity, mentorship, opportunities to help others, and diversity in the workplace when compared with non-Latinos (particularly among first-generation employees who cited working conditions as more favorable). Managers who fail to consider the high and unique value Latinos place on interpersonal exchanges and emotional connectivity may fail to foster motivation and retention in the workplace (Guerrero & Posthuma, 2014).

While Guerrero and Posthuma advanced the literature on Latino core values and perceptions in the workplace, they did not bridge the gap in the literature on Latino employee engagement. They concluded that additional research should be conducted to further understand Latino cultural considerations for job satisfaction and organizational commitment, leveraging social identity theory to frame implications and strategies for application. The following section on cultural considerations synthesizes existing literature on employee engagement across various cultures, provides the rationale for the additional research, and uncovers gaps in the current literature to substantiate this study on employee engagement.

Cultural Considerations

A foundational understanding of diversity and dissimilarity in the workplace confirm that cultural considerations are valuable in the engagement dialogue. In their research on engaging the aging workforce, Avery, McKay, and Wilson (2007) explored the relational gap as it pertains to age and engagement, through the filter of social identity and self-categorization theories; they explicitly referenced demographic categories of race, gender, national origin, or age, to determine how individuals may self-classify within social contexts. For instance, a threat to social identity may be dissimilarity to one's coworkers, resulting in coping through physical or psychological withdrawal or disengagement (Avery et al., 2007). Subsequent research has substantiated the potential for different drivers of engagement among diverse populations, and the value in consideration of cultural contexts relative to emotional connectivity and employee engagement.

Noteworthy gaps have emerged relative to cross-cultural research and employee engagement. In their research on cross-cultural differences in worker presenteeism, Cooper and Luo (2016) proposed the need to study presenteeism and absenteeism through cross-cultural comparisons between the West and East, as previous scholars had not specifically explored presenteeism as a global phenomenon relative to cultural values, social pressures, and workplace behaviors. In an article on cultural variances and employee engagement, Conboy and Yoon (2016) found that cultural values influence employee perceptions of workplace situations, and drivers of engagement and workplace motivation vary depending upon nation-specific cultural components. They also found that in collectivist cultures, there is a higher value placed on teamwork and

interdependence, whereby in individualistic cultures, people are more self-reliant and put a higher value on personal reward and recognition.

Furthermore, they leveraged Hofstede's (1980) seminal cultural dimension theory to explore and provide an understanding of cultural dimensions and variables related to employee engagement. Hofstede (2015) explained this concept even more through his definition of deep culture:

> The culture each of us is born and raised into is the pervasive influence in shaping our social world regarding perceptions, attributions, and actions. It provides the rules of the status-power game that social life constitutes. It thus sets the boundaries for the social identities we perceive and create in our professional lives and for the organization cultures we create and support (p.544).

Hofstede's (1980, 2015) research outlined five dimensions of culture that may have an impact on organizational engagement levels: interpersonal relations, uncertainty avoidance, the importance of gender, power distance, and time orientation. In consideration of cross-cultural differences, Cooper and Luo (2016) revealed cultural variances in employee engagement constructs, physical and mental presenteeism, and self-concept differentiation; they referenced notable differences between collectivist and non-collectivist cultures, love for work versus family, and methods for assigning meaning to situations.

The concept of uncertainty avoidance relates to the cultural value placed on security versus ambiguity. Conboy and Yoon (2016) found that in some cultures, security drives employee motivation and fulfillment, whereby in others, innovation engages more than certainty. Furthermore, they concluded that the importance of gender, as a cultural construct, manifests itself in the workplace through reward and recognition preferences, as masculine cultures favor assertiveness, achievement, and tangible rewards, and

feminine cultures prefer relationships, cooperation, and intangible benefits (such as more time-off work). Additionally, Conboy and Yoon explained the role of power-distance and distribution of decision making relative to organizations; individuals from low power-distance cultures value clear chains of command and decision-making hierarchy, and individuals from high power-distance cultures are more accustomed to democratic decision-making and open discourse in the workplace.

Latino Cultural Considerations

Research on cultural values and job preferences indicate values play a huge part in driving motivation and engagement behaviors. In their study contrasting Latino and Anglo-American values in the workplace, Stone, Johnson, Stone-Romero, and Hartman (2006) found that U.S. HR practices typically reflect Northern European cultural values. Furthermore, they concluded that organizational strategy, HR policy and practices, and psychological foundations ignore culture as consideration for the development and implementation of corporate strategic initiatives and focus. Similarly, in research on cross-cultural differences relative to work and non-work self-aspects and engagement, Cooper and Luo (2016) found that Western culture is more characteristic of individual goals and agendas versus collective approaches. By contrast, several researchers on cultural values, such as Lawton, Kapke, and Gerdes (2016) and Stone et al. (2006), concluded that Latino cultural values include collectivism, familism, respect, conformity and obedience in regards to power distance relationships, flexible time orientation, strong religious beliefs (fatalism), and traditional gender roles. For this reason, Cooper and Luo (2016) also cautioned against applying Western individualistic values to one-size-fits-all managerial approaches.

The potential contrast in cultural values across diverse populations increases the complexity organizational leaders face when developing and implementing employee engagement best practices. The Latino population is not only the fastest growing minority group in the United States, but it also represents a community where assimilation is less likely than other minority groups (Stone, Johnson, Stone-Romero, & Hartman, 2006). Stone et al. contributed to the literature relative to employee engagement, as their findings indicated Latino-American employees felt positive about working in diverse organizations where collectivism and familism were encouraged, and where benefits included flexible hours, opportunities to advance in the organization, favorable retirement plans, and bonuses. Furthermore, they found that while the majority paradigm values of individualism, competition, and separation of work and family life have been at the heart of North American organizational strategy and culture, consideration of other non-dominant cultural values in the workplace may bring value in relationship to organizational growth and sustainability.

Cross-Cultural Comparisons

Despite the absence of substantial research on Latino employee engagement, research on organizations in other countries may provide valuable context and consideration relative to the research problem presented herein. For instance, Rurkkhum and Bartlett (2012) studied 522 employees from four large Thai organizations, exploring the relationship between organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and employee engagement. While several studies have linked OCB (defined here as discretionary effort, and manifested as altruism, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, courtesy, and civic virtue) and engagement, very little research focuses on these behaviors and engagement in

collectivist cultures. As such, this Thai study contributed to knowledge of the subject at a broader international level. Rurkkhum and Bartlett (2012) used established and developed measurement instruments, including a revised version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), but translated them for the first time into the Thai language. While this study was conducted in Thailand and contrasted with research conducted in the United States, there is value in recognizing similar challenges may emerge in North American organizations which are rapidly growing in cultural diversity.

Additional research on employee engagement and OCB emerged from the study of employees in another collectivist culture. In their review of organizational citizenship behavior in a Japan, Wang (2015) evaluated three specific dimensions of OCB: voluntary involvement, generalized compliance, and personal industry, concluding affective commitment has a positive association with voluntary involvement and personal industry. Some specific concepts with a high association to OCB in Japan included the value on collective interest ahead of the individual, the presence of opt-in quality circles, formal reward systems, lifetime employment and unspoken long-term commitment between employer and employee, and shared responsibilities (reinforced through loosely constructed job descriptions). Furthermore, Japanese individuals and organizations tend to value cooperation and teamwork, seniority-based promotion and success, whereby cultural values and variables become embedded in organizational systems and infrastructure, and employer-employee relationships, particularly with increasing globalization.

Further cross-cultural insights emerged from employee engagement research in Indian organizations. In their analysis on the mediating role of employee voice in

employee engagement and affective organizational commitment, Jena, Battacharya, and Pradhan (2017) concluded there is a strong relationship between voice, levels of engagement, and emotional attachment to the organization. Through their analysis of data on 301 executives in the Indian service sector, Jena et al. (2018) confirmed previous conclusions from similar research across industries and geographies, including a strong agreement to the assertion that high levels of employee engagement correlate with high levels of affective commitment in an organization. In a different article on Indian organizations and engagement, Chawla, Dokadia, and Rai (2017) found that, even within Indian organizations, there are vast demographics differences, specific to generational gaps. They revealed multi-generational differences in career preferences, preferences for reward and recognition, and drivers of workplace engagement. Their research suggests that even within specific cultural demographics, variability in individual drivers of engagement may be much more substantial than previously recognized by scholars and practitioners; while overlap exists, there appears to be an abundance of under-researched engagement antecedent variables and constructs.

Assumptions and Implications

Several employee engagement considerations and constructs have surfaced as catalysts for future research. Yun, Hwang, and Lynch (2015) indicated social and historical constructs, combined with cultural nuances, are likely to impact engagement constructs and outcomes. In an article cautioning against inappropriate cross-cultural comparisons, Chen (2008) concluded that to make valid cross-cultural assumptions, it is imperative to consider the appropriateness of measurement instruments, as there is a high incidence of violating measurement invariance in cross-cultural studies. Given the fact

that many North American researchers utilize Western instruments, there is a risk of false application and false assumptions to be applied to focus groups in study settings and theory. Furthermore, there are many components which may impact the psychometric properties of measurement instruments when compared across cultures or ethnic groups: translation, different response styles, and formats, and social desirability (Chen, 2008). Examination of psychometric properties of various instruments may prove valuable before making assumptions of cross-cultural validity.

Employment engagement studies have been conducted globally for several decades. WorkTrends Surveys have been measuring engagement data since 1984 in the United States, and in other countries since 2007; the survey data was collected and analyzed in 2009 to represent workers in 12 countries with the largest economies on the globe: Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Russia, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States (Wiley, Kowske, & Herman, 2010). Acknowledging cultural factors may impact engagement scores, Wiley et al. undertook analysis to uncover the top global drivers of engagement. The result was four macro-drivers: leaders who inspire confidence in the future, managers who reward, recognize and inspire performance, work which is exciting and provides an opportunity for personal skill improvement, and organizations which demonstrate sincere and authentic responsibility for the employees and the community. Overall, country-level drivers of engagement might be more similar than they are dissimilar.

Summary

Engaged employees perform at higher levels and have higher retention levels, contributing to organizational productivity and overall performance. As a result, this

leadership topic has gained growing interest among leaders and human resource professionals throughout the world (Shuck & Wollard, 2011). Kahn (1990) developed a foundational psychological theoretical framework, defining the three key components of engagement as *meaningfulness, safety,* and *availability*. Contemporary psychologists advanced his framework, assessing job demands and resources, social exchange theory, and relevant concepts to explore further and explain the phenomenon of employee engagement in the context of contemporary leadership approaches.

An understanding of cultural antecedents of employee engagement may prove beneficial for leaders and human resource professionals who are crafting organizational engagement strategies. This understanding is particularly impactful when considering the Latino population is the largest minority group in the United States workforce (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2015). Guerrero and Posthuma (2014) identified potential factors for driving employee engagement among Latino employees include interpersonal exchanges, robust socio-emotional connectivity, and high levels of job satisfaction when compared with non-Latinos Additional Latino values emerging from their research include role clarity, mentorship, opportunities to help others, and diversity in the workplace.

Current employee engagement strategies fail to adequately address existing and growing diversity within U.S. organizations and multinational corporations. Conboy and Yoon (2016) suggested that change leaders should complete a cultural evaluation, to incorporate and implement cultural considerations in employee engagement strategies. Furthermore, these engagement approaches should involve detailed research on cultural dimensions related to interpersonal relations. Additionally, given increasing globalization and workforce diversity, they emphasized the importance of understanding cultural

constructs which may impact employee perceptions and behaviors, to implement effective organizational engagement solutions. Furthermore, Hofstede (2015) stressed that, in multinational corporations, cultural values of individual employees vary from company values and practices. Finally, Hofstede concluded that individuals who enter into work relationships bring their culture, personality, personal history, and individual capabilities with them. A deeper understanding of these unique values which translate into the workplace can aid leaders in being more effective at driving engagement and workplace satisfaction.

Several components of relevant literature have been analyzed and synthesized, and the problem has been outlined. The following chapter will expound on the research methods used in this study. Chapter 3 includes a description of the methodology used in this study, including details on the process of gathering and analyzing the data. The primary focus of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the experiences and perspectives of a sampling of first-generation Latino employees through semi-structured interviews. The following chapter also includes a discussion on the overall research design, participant recruitment and selection, manual coding process used to identify conceptual categories and emerging themes, and limitations in the research.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the role of cultural values in shaping the attitudes, beliefs, and work experiences of first-generation Latinos employed at a major global specialty retailer. The intent was to foster additional understanding about culture-specific drivers of employee engagement and disengagement, relative to the lived experiences of the selected participants. In his recommendations for effective qualitative research, Creswell and Creswell (2018) concluded that descriptive and exploratory approaches to research foster development of context and meaning. This approach was adopted to explore further and create a new understanding of cultural considerations and constructs relative to employee engagement. Vagle (2014) defined phenomenology as the study of human experiences, more specifically the way people interact with one another and the things or events occurring around them. The lived experiences of Latino employee engagement were explored and interpreted through this research framework.

Problem Statement

The absence of effective engagement strategies can be costly to an organization. Consequently, the topic of employee engagement has begun to interest many human resources and executive leaders, as investment and success in this area can prove mutually beneficial for organizational performance and individual well-being (Gallup, 2017). As North American organizations have rapidly grown more global in scope, human resource leaders must understand how the changing workplace dynamic may impact employee perception of engagement and effectiveness of strategies. The general problem is that traditional employee engagement approaches are failing to yield favorable

outcomes. Several researchers, including Gallup (2017) and Wagner (2015), have found that strategies which depend upon broad organizational measures and one-size-fits-all approaches are ineffective in improving employee engagement results. Guaspari (2015) and Gallup (2017) found that despite ongoing organizational efforts to drive engagement levels, a majority of employees are still not engaged.

Specific Problem

The specific leadership problem is that often, human resources leaders do not consider individual drivers of engagement when developing and implementing organizational engagement strategies. In proposing more effective methods for employee engagement, Wagner (2015) concluded that many corporate leaders fail to understand that employees should be managed, developed, coached and engaged individually, as people of varying race, gender, and age, are more different then they are similar. Additionally, Shuck, Reio, and Rocco (2011) found that the widening disengagement gap in the workplace, coupled with increasing diversity, indicate unrealized opportunity to narrow the gap through a greater understanding and application of culture-specific antecedents to engagement. Organizational adoption of one-size-fits-all approaches has yielded poor results.

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Research Questions

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The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the role of cultural values in shaping the attitudes, beliefs, and work experiences of Latinos employed at a major global specialty retailer. For leaders to be more effective in improving the efficacy of organizational employee engagement strategies, they must first understand individual drivers of engagement. These questions were designed to help

solve the problem of low employee engagement levels, by exploring how cultural values

may impact how Latino employees engage in the workplace:

1. How do Latino employees at a major global specialty retailer define employee

   engagement?

2. How do Latino employees at a major global specialty retailer describe their

   personal employee engagement experiences?

3. What do Latino employees at a major global specialty retailer perceive to be

   effective and meaningful drivers of employee engagement?

Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested beginning a qualitative research project with a

single concept or theme. As such, the researcher first explored perceptions of employee

engagement in a broad sense. This exploration of the lived experiences of Latino

employee engagement can serve as a foundation for additional research. An examination

of potential drivers of engagement and disengagement, through the lenses of the

participants, may provide insights into how organizational leaders can be more effective

in driving engagement levels.

Research Method

Qualitative inquiry was selected for this research. Creswell and Creswell (2018)

credited qualitative methods with the ability to handle context, intricacy, complexity,

texture, and dimensionality in research. This study followed the characteristics of

qualitative research outlined by Creswell and Creswell, including a fluid collection of

data in a natural setting and through face-to-face interactions, researcher as the primary

instrument, inductive reasoning to build themes and patterns, and focus on participant

meanings throughout the research process to capture diverse perspectives in a holistic

account. Creswell and Creswell (2018) also suggested that qualitative research enables a richer understanding of behavior and attitudes than more rigidly defined research methods.

Phenomenologists focus on intentionality in uncovering meaning. Vagle (2014) defined phenomenology as meaningful interconnectedness to the living world, through a focus on the study of how manifestations come into being. Furthermore, Vagle concluded, "The ordinary lived experience is the very thing the phenomenological craftsperson should aim to explore and not something to aim to move beyond" (p. 69). Similarly, in their exploration of phenomenology, Sloan and Bowe (2014) concluded that hermeneutic phenomenologists research to reveal meanings through gathering data and studying its meaning through interpretation of the text. Additionally, in their article on this methodology, Crowther, Ironside, Spence, and Smythe (2017) concluded that phenomenology naturally involves hermeneutics, as the data analysis inherently depends upon the interpretation and evaluation of texts to creating and synthesize meaning.

Several best practices in qualitative phenomenological research were considered in the crafting and development of the methodology for this study. Vagle (2014) synthesized critical recommendations for phenomenological research: start with a topic of significant personal interest and passion, commitment to lived experiences, reflection on essential themes and meanings, strong writing and appreciation of language, researcher engagement and commitment to thoughtful learning, and a commitment to an evaluation of both parts and whole. These recommendations served as the methodological foundation for this research.

Research Design

Research participants were recruited from the United States headquarters of a major global specialty retailer. This setting was appropriate for finding research participants due to the large size of the employee population, the global nature, and diversity of the organization, and the proximity to the researcher. Potential participants were identified through recruitment approaches approved by human resources leaders in the organization. Once selected, in-person interviews were conducted and recorded in private and quiet conference rooms in the organization's building, to facilitate comfort and neutrality. The research was completed in the winter of 2017. Content included in the recruitment link is in the appendix.

Participants

Phenomenology involves selection of people as the single source of data. In an overview of methods literature, Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, and McKibbon (2015) shared that in phenomenological research, *sampling* refers to the process of selecting participants or informants. For this study, convenience sampling was used for participant selection. According to Gentles et al., it is the most commonly used selection approach for qualitative research. Vagle (2014) suggested there is an excellent value in spending time with multiple participants to get quality data. Likewise, Creswell and Creswell (2018) indicated that a group size of individuals for phenomenological research might be as many as 15, depending upon the topic.

Eleven participants were chosen for this study. Since the primary source of data was interviewing, the larger sample size was selected by the researcher to ensure saturation of critical themes and meanings among the sample population. The participants

were recruited via email to the researcher's contacts, and through personal networking in the organization. Approximately 75% of the participants were recruited through direct researcher/participant contact, while the other participants were from email forwarding. The researcher had moderate familiarity with over 50% of the research participants as a result of previous work interactions. The emails contained a recruitment link, hosted on the online platform *SurveyMonkey*. Contacts were encouraged to forward the link to anyone they thought might be interested in participating in the research. Participants were between the ages of 18-65.

The participant selection survey included a description of the study, a few specific qualifying questions, and details on the next steps. To be selected to participate in the research, the participants had to be employed by the organization, self-identify as first-generation immigrant Latino, and be willing to engage in an initial 30-45-minute interview with subsequent follow-up as needed. Demographics such as age, gender, position within the organization, and length of time in the United States were not variables for this study. The researcher continued the recruitment process until 11 qualifying participants were identified. Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, and McKibbon (2015) suggested a smaller participant population in qualitative research may help produce an understanding of complex, profound, or variable experiences around a specific phenomenon, as opposed to making generalizations about a larger population. This smaller sample size reflects the desire to foster rich meaning and understanding. A copy of the recruitment solicitation letter and survey is in Appendix B.

Instruments

There is evidence that qualitative researchers would find interviewing as the most appropriate form of data collection for this type of study. Vagle (2014) endorsed interviews as the primary tool for gathering qualitative data from research participants, suggesting they enable creativity and exploration of the phenomenon. Similarly, Sloan and Bowe (2014) concluded that interview transcripts from a small group of individual participants are also the favored method for data collection among phenomenological researchers. Creswell and Creswell (2018) agreed that interviews are a valuable and rigorous research instrument for qualitative researchers, fostering openness, dialogue, and conversational tone. Guerrero and Posthuma (2014) found that Latinos are more prone to display acquiescence bias, reflected through a higher tendency to respond positively to questionnaires. Semi-structured open-ended interviews were used in place of structured questionnaires to minimize the potential for bias in the research.

The interviews focused on a set of general questions developed by the researcher in alignment with the overall research questions. Creswell and Creswell (2018) described the flexible nature of qualitative research in that interviewers should deviate from the standard list to probe for additional meaning or clarification as necessary. The interview questions were designed to allow participants to share their perspectives and lived experiences of employee engagement in a semi-structured fashion. Three specific open-ended interview questions were designed to gather insights into each research question. These interview questions are in Appendix D.

Written approvals were obtained before commencing the research interviews, both by the City University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and from individual

research participants. A quiet and private conference room at the research site was reserved in advance and confirmed via Outlook. The questions explicitly focused on the lived experiences and perceptions of employee engagement. There were no specific questions asked about the organization itself, or leaders within the organization. Every attempt was made to ensure each interview participant felt comfortable and was able to share freely about their experiences. Given the research was about employee engagement there was potential for an employee to be distressed or emotionally impacted about the quality of their engagement experiences. The researcher reiterated both verbally and via informed consent that at any time the participant could choose to end the interview or withdraw from participation for any reason. Several recommendations for effective qualitative interviews were used in the research process. These include Vagle's (2014) interview best practices outlined below:

1. Take minimal notes during the interview process, and only to capture critical ideas for additional probing or clarification.

2. Use of an audio recording device during the interviews.

3. Leave "no stone unturned" by asking probing questions like "tell me more about that" (p. 81).

4. Schedule subsequent interviews with participants as needed.

A narrative approach was adopted as a framework for conducting interviews with the research participants. Creswell and Creswell (2018) found that a narrative structure is valuable when a researcher has gathered data from one or more individuals, recounting personal stories or life experiences. Furthermore, the interviewer encourages the interviewee to narrate about their lived experiences and also reflect on their personal

narrative. The interview guide and protocol were developed by the researcher, with open-ended questions and sub-questions, designed to support the research questions outlined herein, and grounded in the review of the literature. The researcher asked probing questions to foster additional meaning and understanding of the phenomenon as described by the participants. The interview guide and protocol are Appendix C and D.

Data Recording and Storage

All the interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed for researcher analysis, as recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018). A digital sound recorder, Olympus WS-100, was used to record all the interviews. A professional dissertation transcription service completed data transcription. A transcript of each interview was stored and retained in digital format, and a physical research journal was used to capture notes. All written consent forms and documents, including transcription and researcher notes, were scanned and saved in computer files. As also recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018), a master list of all files and information gathered were compiled and saved as a means of organizing data and providing easy access to necessary documentation. The digital data are collected on a password protected and encrypted external drive and will be stored securely for a minimum of five years, at which point they will be destroyed.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis included a careful reduction of interview transcripts. As recommended by Sloan and Bowe (2014), themes and statements were identified and extracted by the researcher. Creswell and Creswell (2018) reinforced the importance of ensuring anonymity in the retained documents. As such, each participant received a

pseudonym. The pseudonym assignments are in a file separate from the remainder of the research documentation. The researcher engaged in a hermeneutic analysis and interpretive process, described by Crowther, Ironside, Spence, and Smythe (2017) in their overview of hermeneutic phenomenology methods.

The researcher coded the data by hand using a whole-parts-whole process. This included a holistic reading of the entire text, a first line-by-line reading and note taking, notation of any follow up questions for research participants, a second line-by-line reading, a third line-by-line reading for analytical thoughts and reflections, and subsequent readings, as needed, to identify meaning units, themes or manifestations, and formulation of titles (Vagle, 2014). Vagle found that thematic analysis is a preferred approach in qualitative research. A structured thematic analysis was completed for each research participant, in a table format, to reflect each emerging meaning unit, sub-theme, and theme.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

Credibility and trustworthiness are an essential consideration in fully developed research methods. In their research on ensuring rigor in qualitative research, El Hussein, Jakubec, and Osuji (2016) outlined several best practices in a mnemonic strategy coined FACTS (fittingness, auditability, credibility, trustworthiness, saturation). Several of these practices were selected for this research and are listed below.

- Confirmability through consistent record-keeping and documentation;

- A vivid description of the phenomenon in the study:

- Clearly defined and detailed research methods;

- Scrutiny of the research design by academics at the research institution;

For this phenomenological research, transferability was not the desired outcome as much as fostering further understanding of the topic and foundation for additional qualitative or quantitative studies. Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested several tactics for improving transferability in research, which was adopted for this research design. These include the researcher providing the following information before commencing the research: site and location for conducting research, the number of participants, data collection methods, and data collection details and timing. Furthermore, to enhance dependability and confirmability, a research strategy and execution plan was clearly outlined, including a detailed methodological description and operational detail of data gathering.

Anticipated Ethical Issues

Some of the potential ethical issues for the researcher included anonymity and confidentiality, discussion of confidential information relative to the experiences of participants, and discussion of a potentially sensitive topic, given organizational climate and engagement results. Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested a structured research design, appropriate consent, private environments, and thoughtful research execution should help minimize the potential for ethical issues to emerge. The researcher did not share personal opinions or perspectives on the research topic and refrained from sharing any additional information which may have influenced what the participants share about their lived experiences of employee engagement. All attempts were made to protect the confidentiality of participants; however, the use of internal communication channels like Outlook may have interfered with complete anonymity. The researcher refrained from asking any questions specific to organizational experiences or members of the

organization. If the participants referenced any specific corporate experiences during the interviews, the researcher reinforced that all efforts would be made to maintain anonymity.

Significance of the Study

More effective engagement strategies will help leaders drive organizational performance and retention. The results of this study provide new and useful information for executive leaders and human resources professionals in the development, deployment, and sustainability of organizational engagement strategies. In their article on drivers of employee engagement, Shuck and Wollard (2011) found that leaders who can identify antecedents within their organization are more likely to develop and implement viable engagement strategies, identify challenges, and communicate their path forward more effectively. An awareness of potential culture-specific drivers or antecedents of engagement may equip practitioners to improve leadership effectiveness, enhance cultural awareness in an increasingly global workforce, and drive organizational performance and sustainability.

The findings from this study provide specific insight into how human resources and executive leaders at this major global specialty retailer can drive engagement among the Latino population of employees. The researcher explored the role of cultural values in shaping the attitudes, beliefs, and work experiences of Latinos employed at the organization. Transitioning from a one-size-fits-all approach to one which incorporates the cultural values of specific populations may help leaders drive employee engagement levels and organizational performance. In their research on collaborative leadership and employee relations, Townsend, Wilkinson, and Burgess (2014) reinforced the importance

of individualized approaches to people leadership and partnership. Not only does this study reveal insight into this particular population, but the data may also provide insight into the role cultural values play in shaping the attitudes, beliefs, and work experiences of other populations.

This study should also provide new information and considerations on how to increase employee engagement levels of Latino employees in this organization, to improve individual and organizational performance and retention levels. The study sheds light on how to improve employee engagement on a larger scale, through a focused understanding of the role cultural values may have on employee engagement experiences of individual workplace associates.

Limitations

Limitations of this study included sample size, the potential for researcher bias, and population selection. The data is limited to a small sample size at a major global specialty retailer, located in the Midwest. Data is also limited to open-ended interviews, which are not designed to be all-inclusive or all-compassing regarding employee engagement or Latino culture. There are apparent differences in cultural values among those who identify as Latino (Stone, Johnson, Stone-Romero, & Hartman, 2006). This study did not identify variances among population subgroups. Guerrero and Posthuma (2014) found that first-generation Latino employees are more likely to experience difficulty in communication and concept translation Thus, the study findings may also be impacted by fluency in the English language,

Delimitations

Boundaries included the inclusion of only first-generation Latino participants for the research. This boundary was necessary due to the scope of potential research and data available on the topic. This choice was also related to the desire to gain additional insight into this specific population, with regards to the cultural antecedents of employee engagement. The scope of research was limited to the particular organization chosen for the study, specific research questions outlined herein, and the philosophical framework as the foundation for the research methodology.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the role of cultural values in shaping the attitudes, beliefs, and work experiences of Latinos employed at a major global specialty retailer. A qualitative approach was chosen by the researcher to foster additional understanding of the phenomenon. This study evolved the dialogue on employee engagement relative to Latino cultural values and employee engagement. The researcher conducted open-ended semi-structured interviews, recognized as a valuable tool among qualitative researchers for fostering open dialogue and exploring rich topics. The results of this study provide both specific insights into how leaders at a major global specialty retailer can drive engagement among Latino employees, and the role cultural values play in shaping the attitudes, beliefs, and work experiences of other populations. Also, the results of the study provide new and useful information for leaders who are developing, implementing and measuring organizational engagement strategies. Awareness of culture-specific drivers of employee engagement

may help leaders to be more effective in driving organizational performance and sustainability in an increasingly diverse and global workforce.

The following chapter provides an overview of research findings resulting from the analysis of the transcripts from the semi-structured open-ended interviews of 11 participants. The analysis was conducted using the research methods outlined in Chapter 3. Following a whole-parts-whole analysis manual coding process, the research findings were organized into conceptual categories and synthesized into three key themes emerging from the data: workplace relationships, feeling valued, and leadership communication. Insight into the experiences and perceptions of first-generation Latino employees regarding employee engagement experiences are explored in more depth to provide meaning and context.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the role of cultural values in shaping the attitudes, beliefs, and work experiences of Latinos employed at a major global specialty retailer. The results of the study provide new and useful information for executive leaders and human resources professionals in the development, deployment, and sustainability of effective organizational engagement strategies. In their research on antecedents of employee engagement, Shuck and Wollard (2011) found that awareness of potential culture-specific drivers of engagement may equip practitioners to improve leadership efficacy, enhance cultural awareness in an increasingly global workforce, and drive organizational performance. The findings are presented according to the themes and categories emerging from the hand-coding and subsequent whole-parts-whole analysis of the data.

Methodology

Research participants were from the United States headquarters of a major global specialty retailer. This site location was chosen due to the ability to find research participants among a large and physically concentrated employee population, the global nature and diversity of the organization, and proximity to the researcher. Participants were identified through recruitment approaches approved by human resources leaders in the organization. Once the participants were selected, a total of 11 interviews were conducted and recorded in private conference rooms in the organization's building, to facilitate comfort and neutrality. One of the interviews was completed and recorded over the phone. The research concluded in the winter of 2017. Supporting documents used in the recruitment process are in Appendix A and B.

Participants

Participants were selected in alignment with the principles of phenomenological research, utilizing people as the single source of data. For this study, convenience sampling was used for participant selection and recruitment; it is the most commonly used selection approach for qualitative research (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015). Eleven participants were chosen for the study. Participants were recruited via email to the researcher's contacts, and through personal networking in the organization. The emails contained a recruitment link, hosted on the online platform *SurveyMonkey*. Contacts were encouraged to forward the link to anyone they thought might be interested in participating in the research. The researcher continued the recruitment process until 11 qualified participants were selected.

Participants were adults between the ages of 18-65, with gender composition 50% male and 50% female. The ages of the participants varied. Two participants were under the age of 30, two participants who were exactly 30, two participants were between the ages of 30-40, and five participants were over the age of 40. The participant population was 45% female and 55% male. Positions held within the organization ranged from Trainee to Director, and 82% of the participants had some level of college education. Tenure of participants ranged from 1-37 years, with an average of 7.54 years of tenure and a median tenure of 2.3 years. Demographics such as age, gender, position within the organization, and length of time in the United States were not independent variables for this study. The following table summarizes the research participant demographic data.

Table 4.1

Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Education	Position	Tenure (Yrs)
Alisa	F	Under 30	BA	Coordinator	1.3
Israel	M	Over 40	AA	Manager	1.5
Leo	M	30	MA	Sr. Manager	1
Malia	F	30	BA	Analyst	9
Minerva	F	Under 30	BA	Trainee	1.4
Francesco	M	Over 40	BA	Director	37
Cindy	F	Over 40	BA	Coordinator	1.5
Raul	M	30-40	HS	Manager	2.3
Juan	M	30-40	HS	Manager	11
Sara	F	Over 40	BA	Manager	13
Jose	M	Over 40	MA	Sr. Manager	4

Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to ensure anonymity. Creswell and

Creswell (2018) reinforced this idea of anonymity as a best practice in qualitative

research. The pseudonym assignments are stored in a secure file separate from the

remainder of the research documentation.

Data Analysis

Data analysis included a review of interview transcripts, starting with the first

reading of each transcript before coding, and the use of phenomenological reduction and

bracketing to suspend researcher judgment about the world. Before coding the data, the

transcribed interviews were each formatted into uniform and usable formats for

notetaking, creating margins in the document for descriptive coding, notetaking, and

subsequent conceptual categories. The researcher coded the data by hand using a whole-

parts-whole process, which included a holistic reading of the entire text, a first line-by-

line reading and note taking, notation of any follow up questions for research

participants, a second line-by-line reading, a third line-by-line reading for analytical

thoughts and reflections, and subsequent readings, as needed, to identify meaning units

and themes (Vagle, 2014). After the initial reading, the conceptual categories and statements were identified and extracted, as recommended by Sloan and Bowe (2014). Highlighting of the text was used to capture descriptive codes in each interview transcript, and first impression codes were circled or underlined. The researcher used margins for notetaking on conceptual categories and emerging themes and also outlined blocks of texts which fostered additional meaning and context to substantiate those themes.

Thematic analysis is a preferred approach in qualitative research. A structured analysis was completed for each research question, in a table format, to reflect each emerging descriptive code, first impression code, and conceptual categories. Engaging in hermeneutic analysis and interpretive process, as outlined by Crowther, Ironside, Spence, and Smythe (2017), the researcher extracted and interpreted the results of the data to create meaning. The data was then organized by compiling descriptive and first impression codes for each question in a hand-written table format before formatting each table into the dissertation document. This was a final step to review codes, meanings, and emerging conceptual categories from the interview data.

Presentation of Findings

The overall research findings are being presented in a table organized by themes and categories emerging from the data. Several open-ended interview questions tied to the three research questions (located in Appendix D) guided the research. For the initial coding of raw data, the descriptive codes, first-impression codes, and conceptual categories from each research question were compiled in individual tables. The raw data tables are located in Appendix F. The coding process involved a careful review and

reduction of descriptive codes, first impression codes, conceptual categories, and emerging themes. Each research question was coded and analyzed individually, and then reviewed as a whole. Descriptive codes and first impression codes with a single occurrence in the interview transcripts were removed from the analysis and excluded from the tables and subsequent thematic analysis. The final data tables in Appendix F include a number corresponding to the frequency of the descriptive codes and first impression codes emerging from the coding of the interview transcripts.

The key themes and concepts which surfaced from each research question had substantial overlap with the other research questions, making separation of findings by research question challenging. For example, in most instances, as interview participants answered questions relative to their personal definition of employee engagement, they were often relating to and recounting their lived engagement experiences. Participants were unable to separate the explanation from their experience with the phenomenon of employee engagement. Similarly, as participants recounted experiences of both negative and positive engagement, suggestions for improvement were provided in the same narrative. The descriptive and textural nature of the data led to the synthesis of the findings by emerging themes and categories, as opposed to specific corresponding research questions.

After a thorough review of the descriptive codes and first impression codes emerging from each of the three research questions, several conceptual categories emerged from the data. These include the ability to grow and advance, personal connection, teamwork and relationships, enjoyment in the workplace, sense of belonging, individual opportunities for growth and development, communication, transparency,

considering the needs of individuals, connectedness to the same minority group, and appreciation/recognition. The key themes resulting from the emerging conceptual categories are workplace relationships, feeling valued, and leadership communication. The following table summarizes the conceptual categories relative to the emerging themes from the data analysis.

Table 4.2

Themes and Conceptual Categories

Themes	Conceptual Categories
Workplace Relationships	Team, Connection, Relationships Minority Groups Enjoyment in the Workplace
Feeling Valued	Consideration of Individual Needs Sense of Belonging/Inclusion Contribution Appreciation/Recognition
Leadership Communication	Communication and Transparency Connection to Organizational Goals Sense of Purpose Security Opportunities for Growth

Theme: Workplace Relationships

Relationships in the workplace resonated throughout the research, as many participants referenced how relationships both positively and negatively impact their employee engagement experiences. References to connection, emotion, and personal interaction surfaced in the research, as participants shared their experiences. Also, participants referenced the value of relationship and camaraderie with other individuals in their same minority group, suggesting organizations which support and foster minority group connections add value to employee engagement experiences.

Findings in the category Team, Connection, Relationships. This theme

emerged consistently in both the descriptive codes and the first impression codes. Some

of the codes most relating to this theme include team, commitment, fun, group,

connected, family, relationships, welcome, considered as a person, part of bigger picture

and give and take. Juan mentioned, "We have a great team dynamic, and our director

does a great job at keeping us involved, so it's a very easy environment to work in right

now currently for us." Minerva shared "It is the feeling of belonging. Um, to a certain

team, work team and company. . . Depending on the people that you work with, in my

opinion, that's a big part of how engaged are you with your work." Malia also shared the

importance of teamwork and relationships in her multiple references to connection,

connecting, great relationships, and enjoying coming to work primarily because of the

people at work by which she has built and nurtured relationships.

On multiple occasions, relative to relationships and emotional connection,

recollections of deep feelings of love and family connection emerged in the research. In

describing moments when he has felt most engaged in the workplace, Francesco shared

about feeling a part of the family he worked for at one point in his career:

> I truly felt part of-in this case part of their family because I was working with
> them. I'm not saying working for them; I'm working with them. I think I even
> going to say they loved us as we care for them, that's why. On that point, we
> didn't care what we were doing for them…There were times the owner was
> having problems with the toilet for instance. She will call one of us, "could you
> please help me out?" Of course, I will do that today. I don't know. It was like
> treating my…I don't know, my mother because she was a little older, like my
> grandmother. I think that was the type of relationship.

Francesco shared about another familial experience where he felt very engaged in the

workplace. "My wife and I went to Panama for a couple weeks. When I came back, my

grass was cut, and I didn't know what happened. Well, the VP of the department went to the house and cut the grass for me…Isn't that a family or what?"

Taking a personal interest also surfaced in the interviews relative to personal connection and relationships. Raul shared "One example would be when I moved up here. After a while my mom got sick. My supervisor at that time actually even took the time to be like 'hey, how's your mom doing now? Is she doing any better?' Stuff like that. Just taking an interest, I feel." Raul reiterated how important supervisors showing an interest in personal well-being is relative to his own engagement experiences:

> Well, I have a work permit actually. In March of this year, I actually have to—My lawyer is down there in Texas. He's the one that is doing all my paperwork. When I have to fly down to Texas in March, I needed some extra times off, and I didn't have enough hours. I actually brought it up to my supervisor. We talked to my supervisor and the department head. They helped me out so I can fly down. They were like "yes, do whatever you have to do." Because I needed to renew my permit. They actually took the interest and went above and beyond helping me out.

Findings in the category Minority Groups. This theme, which refers to the connection to individuals of the same minority group, is closely related to the second theme of *teamwork and relationships*. However, it resonated distinctly and independently as a unique theme in the interview transcripts because of the frequency of occurrences in the interview transcripts. As a result, this theme stands independent from the rest. Israel referenced employee engagement "as creating small communities or groups for support and, you know, getting to know people of your same, like right now, same race or interest." Minerva mentioned "having some similarity with the people that you work with." Francesco mentioned the ability to connect in cultural or social activities.

Findings in the category Enjoyment in the Workplace. There were several descriptive codes, and a few first impression codes, that contributed to this theme

emerging in the interview data. Happy, enjoy, fun, involved, events, passion, and

relationships all support the emergence of this theme. Participants often changed their

physical demeanor and verbal tonality when references to workplace fun emerged.

Smiles, laughter, and a general light-heartedness surfaced when participants referenced

enjoyment in the workplace relative to their definition and conceptualization of employee

engagement. Leo defined engagement as "how do companies like to keep Latino

employees in general engagement, employees happy and proud of what they do." He also

referenced "certain activities and rules done by the company to make sure people, their

employees, are happy with everything...happy with what they do and with the objective

of increasing the loyalty and making them perform better."

Malia also reinforced the concept of happiness at work, referenced multiple times

in her explanation of engagement.

> Employee engagement, I mean, is just really making sure that people I guess are
> happy at work...happy is kind of, I guess, having fun at work, enjoying coming to
> work I guess. You kind of have to enjoy what you do in the first place. Um, I
> mean it's just, it' not just about 100% work, it's also kind of getting connected
> with the people, with the people you work with, which I actually think we do a
> pretty good job at. Um, and I guess that's kind of where the happy place is.

Several other participants mentioned enjoying the workplace when asked about defining

employee engagement. Raul said "What comes to mind is basically it's just like little

events done here within the company...We do the birthdays, coordinating a big

celebration. They put cake and everything for everybody."

Francesco also referenced enjoyment in the workplace in his description of what

employee engagement means to him personally:

> To me it's how the organization makes me feel, meaning am I happy?...it can be
> fun, and fun doesn't mean singing and dancing, rather enjoying what you're doing.
> As long as an organization has an atmosphere that you can have fun, I think it's

> great. When fun cease to exist, and then it just becomes just a job, then I think
> that's the time where the employee should depart the organization, because then,
> if it's just a job, you don't put 100% of you.

Other participants also mentioned enjoyment in the workplace as related to activities,

events, and opportunities to be rewarded and recognized, but personally and

professionally. While activities and events initiated and fostered by the organization were

identified as helping make the workplace more enjoyable, most who referenced activities

and events shared these things alone do not equate to employee engagement. Cindy

shared some insight into happiness with her comment, "I want to know how I can be

happy here. I think that it's important to take the time to understand what we want."

These feelings of enjoyment and happiness in the workplace connect to some of the other

emerging themes referenced herein.

Theme: Feeling Valued

Researcher analysis of the interview data, consistent with the tonality and body

language of the participants, revealed a strong theme of feeling valued as related to

personal employee engagement experiences. The experiences shared consistently related

to personal and emotional connection and a sense of value among both direct-report and

peer relationships, as well as a contribution to small teams and the broader organizational

unit.

Findings in the category Consideration of Individual Needs. This theme is also

closely connected to a subtheme emerging in the data, the desire to be treated and cared

for as a person, not just an employee. Consideration of individual needs emerged in the

context of flexibility, personal interest, care, concern, respect, exchange of feedback,

being heard and valued, and feeling a part of the bigger picture. Raul shared it's about

"also taking an interest in your personal life, reaching out. One example would be when I moved up here after a while my mom got sick. My supervisor at that time actually even took the time to be like 'hey, how's your mom doing now? Is she doing any better?'...just taking an interest." Raul also mentioned the importance of caring about "well-being not just here within the company but outside," referring to supervisors who had taken an interest in his well-being and went above and beyond to help him out. Similarly, Minerva shared "Inclusion is not only related just to the work but also related to how they make you feel as a person. If they take your feelings, your moods, even, um, your wants and needs into consideration." Sara mentioned feedback exchange as part of defining employee engagement. "I would think is approaching your employees, trying to get feedback from them on how the company is doing, or what is working, what is not working."

Findings in the category Sense of Belonging/Inclusion. Minerva shared "Inclusion is not only related just to the work but also related to how they make you feel as a person. If they take your feelings, your moods, even, um, your wants and needs into consideration." She also shared how judgment can prevent feelings of inclusion and engagement in the workplace in an experience she recounted during the interview:

> And one person that was higher rank…she was like "oh, so you have an accent."
> She didn't ask me what I was doing there, what I was working on. Immediately
> went asking about my accent, and for me, that was like…and that even gets to the
> point of being offensive. And I'm not trying to hide it, but for example, my friend
> that works in, she's also Colombian, and she works in a school in Miami, she tells
> me that's one of her biggest struggles, that when she's in a meeting with parents
> and stuff, she's a teacher. She hates that she might be nervous and show her accent
> because she feels like with that people might judge her, you know?

A sense of belonging and feelings of inclusion was related to positive employee engagement while the opposite was considered relative to negative employee engagement experiences.

Findings in the category Contribution. Several participants shared the importance of contributing to the big picture or organizational goals in their responses to questions about employee engagement experiences. There were recurring references to contribution, relative to the lived experiences of employee engagement, with references to being part of the bigger picture, part of achieving goals, results-orientation, and involvement. The common thread that resonated was the desire to contribute or have purpose and meaning in the workplace. Leo mentioned, "If you're not paying attention to recommendations that I make, then what's the point of my role…summarized as meaning."

Findings in the category Appreciation/Recognition. Appreciation and recognition emerged as a category in the interviews. In recounting experiences with disengagement, Malia shared "The people no longer feel like they're appreciated…People are not focused on people anymore. People are focused on kind of just numbers, numbers, numbers." Francesco also shared how lack of appreciation relates to his feelings of disengagement in the workplace:

> My point is, I still go home at six. If I can do it, great, I will do it. But, I don't sacrifice myself either, because I feel that the company is not sacrificing for me at all, as a matter of fact. I mean, I'm just that number written somewhere. Whenever that time that the expiration of that number comes up, they already know what to think about it. That's the way I feel today…If they make me feel that I can be replaced any day. In other words, there is no personal feelings, just being that number with an expiration date.

In recounting experiences where she felt disengaged in the workplace, Cindy shared "I used the word when I have a meeting with my previous supervisor over there was…unappreciated. That was the word. I felt unappreciated." As with the other categories, appreciation/recognition surfaced as a category relative to both engagement and disengagement.

Theme: Leadership Communication

The theme of leadership communication emerged throughout the data, as multiple participants referenced the importance of communication and transparency, connection to organizational mission and values, a sense of purpose, security, and opportunities for growth, as relative to employee engagement experiences. Efficacy of leadership communication surfaced as both a potential enabler and potential hindrance to positive employee engagement. In a recent article on engagement and organizational resources, Albrecht, Breidahl, and Marty (2018) confirmed a strong association between clear and visionary communication of senior leadership and higher employee engagement levels.

Findings in the category Communication and Transparency. Francesco shared "If you maintain an open communication with your employees, I think you gain a lot of points. That communication doesn't have to be telling them what they are not supposed to know. But rather, at least reassuring what the goals of the company are." Many participants referenced the importance of regular one-on-ones, meetings (individual, team, organizational), and both formal and informal touchpoints as essential in engagement experiences. Several shared that the absence of effective communication creates insecurity, negative feelings, and is related to disengagement.

Findings in the category Connection to Organizational Goals. Several participants expressed their perceived value in being connected to the goals of the organization in which they work. Israel shared "that's really feeling engaged like you're really…once you come in here, you feel like you belong and you're doing something for the greater picture." Others shared the desire to be connected to the broader organizational mission, goals, and values. Participants shared that their ability to combine their efforts to the larger purpose of the organization related to their levels of engagement or disengagement in the workplace.

Findings in the category Sense of Purpose. This category relates to the above category of connection to organizational goals, except some participants identified unique value in personal goals and contributions, while others resonated more with personal contributions as part of the bigger picture. Both related, however, to a sense of purpose. Leo shared "when you don't have a goal on what you're doing when you don't know why you're doing it, that generally generates some level of disengagement...I mean if I know I'm doing something that is going to generate x, y, or z, I'm going to put the extra effort way more easily than the other way." In this example, a sense of belonging has the potential to impact levels of discretionary effort displayed in the workplace.

Findings in the category Security. This category also overlaps with several other emerging conceptual categories, and was often referenced in the greater context of leadership communication, transparency, ambiguity or uncertainty, and feeling valued or appreciated for the unique strengths an individual brings to the team. Security was also related to trust and financial security/compensation. Leo shared about one time in which he felt disengaged. "When I started here, a few months afterwards…right before the

merger was announced… my department was disappeared. And so for about a period of 6 months, I didn't know what was going to happen to us. So, of course, taking out that basic level of certainty to a person, uh, would make you be disengaged regardless of the other things."

Findings in the category Opportunities for Growth. One of the most prominent themes that emerged in how participants defined employee engagement, and what it meant to them personally, was the concept of growth and advancement in the organization. As explained, growth related to the ability to grow skills, compensation, experiential learning, and development of mutually-beneficial relationships in the workplace. The concept of growth was also associated with the ability to be rewarded based on performance and being provided with additional opportunities. Exchange of ideas, feedback, and contributions in the workplace also resonated in the transcripts. Some of the codes which most closely related to this emerging theme for defining employee engagement and personal meaning for the participants include grow, growth, opportunities/exposure, values, and needs.

Multiple participants referenced growth and opportunities for exposure or advancement as they described how they define and personally related to employee engagement. Minerva shared the following as she explained what engagement meant to her personally, "If you're in a place where you feel like you're working with people who are not contributing to your personal and work growth, I think it's not worth it to stay there." Cindy mentioned providing "some tools so the employee can grow in the company maybe. Involve the employee with the growing of the company." Cindy referenced growth on multiple occasions as related to the organization helping support

the growth and goals of each employee in the organization. "I just want to know if what is my options here. How can I grow? How can I help you? How can I help the group? I'm saying that I need to know what is my end scenario so I can grow." Juan referenced the importance of frequent communication and supervisor interactions in the context of growth. "I expect my director to touch base with this on a frequent basis."

Israel recounted one of the most illustrative references to being given opportunities to grow from organizational leadership:

> This man gave me wings. I went in with nothing, and this many gave me wings, and it was the most amazing experience, and it was a lot of work. A lot of work. A lot of late nights, overnights, travel, everything, but I loved every minute of it. And that's the main reason is that man had an open door for being the CEO of the company, and open door where I can walk in and say "can we talk for a moment?" And he listened. And he might say no, and I respect that, but he might say why don't we try it and see. It was so good to know that it's a lot riding on your butt if they're just saying let me try this or whatever, but he was willing to take a chance on you. And he took a chance, and you prove yourself, and your defeats or your failures and celebrate our successes. To me that was incredible. And that was the one fear I had moving away was not having that feeling again.

Although some participants mentioned activities and events in the context of engagement, many participants shared that activities and events alone do not drive engagement, rather an investment in growth and development meant so much more in the context of their engagement experiences. Regarding a supervisor relationship, Cindy shared "He constantly tell me what to do and what are the expectation and what are his plans and what I can do and all of that…I feel that for the first time someone did more than activities for me." In her final statement on drivers of engagement, Cindy added "like I say in meetings and follow-up about that meetings. Show me the possibility to grow through the company I will say."

Summary

The qualitative research and subsequent data analysis of interview transcripts surfaced the following key themes relative to the participants' employee engagement experiences: workplace relationships, feeling valued, and leadership communication. Descriptive and first impression codes were utilized in the research to classify conceptual categories emerging from the analysis. The codes were then synthesized to develop key themes emerging from the interviews with 11 first-generation Latino employees at a major global specialty retailer. While the researcher used individual interview questions to explore and uncover meaning relative to three specific research questions, there was substantial overlap in the participant responses. This overlap was the impetus for organizing the presentation of findings relative to emerging themes and categories across all three research questions.

The following chapter focuses on research conclusions and a discussion of findings. The research findings are presented relative to the problem statement, each research question, and to current research on employee engagement. Chapter 5 also contains a discussion of the application of these findings for organizational leaders and human resources practitioners, so they may consider opportunities for further research and exploration to narrow the engagement gap. Recommendations for action and future research are also outlined.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the role of cultural values in shaping the attitudes, beliefs, and work experiences of Latinos employed at a major global specialty retailer. The researcher insights from the study provide new and useful information for executive leaders and human resources professionals in the development, deployment, and sustainability of organizational engagement strategies. Awareness of potential culture-specific drivers or antecedents of engagement may equip practitioners to improve leadership efficacy, enhance cultural awareness in an increasingly global workforce, and drive organizational performance and sustainability (Shuck & Wollard, 2011). Based on the literature review, the following three research questions were developed:

1. How do Latino employees at a major global specialty retailer define employee engagement?

2. How do Latino employees at a major global specialty retailer describe their personal employee engagement experiences?

3. What do Latino employees at a major global specialty retailer perceive to be effective and meaningful drivers of employee engagement?

This qualitative phenomenological study summarizes the findings from open-ended semi-structured interviews with 11 first-generation Latino participants from a major global specialty retailer, located within the Midwest region of the United States. Convenience sampling was used to recruit eligible participants accessible to the researcher. The methodology was selected due to the contextual and exploratory nature of the topic. Research data was coded by hand using a whole-parts-whole process (Vagle,

2014), with the following key themes emerging from the reduced conceptual categories: workplace relationships, feeling valued, and leadership communication.

Following this introduction, the remainder of this chapter focuses on key areas related to the employee engagement experiences of first-generation Latino immigrants. This section includes a discussion of the findings and conclusions for each research question, application of findings and conclusions to the problem statement and leadership, recommendations for action, and recommendations for further research on the topic.

Discussion of Findings and Conclusions

The interview protocol involved a series of individual open-ended questions designed to provide insight into each research question. While each research question was analyzed and coded individually for conceptual categories and meaning units, the use of a whole-parts-whole coding process led to the emergence of three key themes in the data. The themes are distinct and individually create context and meaning relative to Latino employee engagement; however, several concepts and references among the themes overlap or relate to one another.

RQ1: How do Latino employees at a major global specialty retailer define employee engagement?

The first research question aligned with questions 1, 2, and 3 in the interview protocol (Appendix D). The intent behind this question was the exploration of similarities or differences in how Latino employees specifically define employee engagement. It was also designed to uncover personal meaning relative to the topic. This question examined levels of familiarity with and exposure to the concept of employee engagement. There

was wide variability in how participants defined and explained employee engagement. There was also considerable variability among participants in familiarity with the overall concept of employee engagement. The majority of participants shared that they had little familiarity at all with employee engagement, and many struggled to define employee engagement, and what it meant to them personally.

Familiarity with the concept of employee engagement. Participants in this study had varied levels of familiarity with the concept of employee engagement. Only one participant said they were *familiar*. Six of the participants shared they were *not familiar*, while the remaining four participants shared, they were *somewhat familiar.* It is not surprising, given various roles and tenure with the organization, and also given the diversity of personal and professional experiences, that there was considerable variability in levels of familiarity with employee engagement. None of the participants referred to organizational engagements strategies or efforts but spoke more about what engagement meant to them personally. There were no references to specific organizational action steps or accountability. In general, research participants in leadership roles had higher levels of familiarity with employee engagement than those in non-supervisory positions.

Defining employee engagement. The participants had a wide range of definitions for employee engagement. This range is not surprising given the variation in familiarity with the concept overall. Alisa defined employee engagement as "the commitment that an employee has with an organization in order to provide a better job…I have my shoes on, and I have my shirt on, do my best work and deliver my best." Israel defined engagement as the following:

> It's how our leaders bring the employees into the mix by inquiring more about
> their needs and also feedback about what their needs are as employees and as an

individual in the company. And also engagement as employees as creating small communities or groups for support and, you know, getting to know people of your same, like right now, same race or same interest. The different types of engagement to make them feel included in the same organization.

One participant defined engagement as "feeling linked with the company. Like all the things they do to increase loyalty," while another defined engagement as making sure people are happy at work. Francesco's definition was "the way a company might involve the employees in the organization, meaning by either cultural or activities. Some of the words which surfaced included happiness, loyalty, fun, incentives, involvement, participation, tools, events, and valued. While no common or consistent definition of employee engagement emerged from the participant interviews, coding of the data surfaced key themes of workplace relationships, feeling valued, and leadership communication, as closely related to the concept of engagement.

Engagement and personal meaning. Participant employee engagement experiences and personal meaning around the topic were also wide-ranging. In recounting employee engagement and what it meant to him personally, Israel shared "It's about open relationships with not only the people on my team but also the ones I'm surrounded by." Another shared about the importance of relationships with the same population. "A big thing with being an immigrant is you want to know other immigrants…it's always easier to relate to people who also don't know many people." Malia shared "to me it comes back to the connection. Connecting with the people you work…having great relationships." Several other participants referenced the importance of people they worked with relative to their personal employee engagement experiences.

Within the data, there were substantial differences among participants regarding overall concept familiarity and definitions of employee engagement. The one constant

was that engagement was consistently referenced in the context of relationships. Where participants referenced positive relationships and healthy lines of communication, they also referenced higher levels of personal employee engagement. Conversely, where participants felt disconnected from productive relationships or conversations, they recounted negative personal engagement experiences in the workplace.

The conceptual categories and themes that emerged from the data do align closely with Gallup's working definition of engagement outlined in the key terms; however, the themes emerging from the research also suggest that connection to individuals in the workplace resonated more than a link to the company itself. In an article on ways to improve employee engagement, Reilly (2014) defined engaged employees in the context of passion and commitment to the organization in which they work, pushing forward with innovation to improve organizational performance. In this study, participants frequently referenced connection; however, the primary connections they referenced were to other individuals in the organization. Participants referenced connection and relationships relative to peers, teams, and supervisors, and connections made with others both inside and outside the workplace. Positive engagement experiences connected more to familial relationships and personal connections than to the company or brand itself.

RQ 2: How do Latino employees at a major global specialty retailer describe their personal employee engagement experiences?

This research question was developed to explore individual positive and negative employee engagement experiences among the participant population. The interview questions designed for this research question focused on personal experiences with high levels of engagement in workplace, experiences related to personal disengagement in the

workplace, and how engagement levels may or may not impact other areas of

participants' personal or professional lives.

Experiences with high levels of engagement. As part of the interview protocol,

each participant was asked to recall a time or experience in the workplace in which

he/she had the highest levels of personal engagement. Participants shared about being

part of a great team, doing exciting work, opportunities for growth and exposure, feeling

empowered, feelings of appreciation, and relational experiences. Francesco recounted

two experiences, both of which made him feel part of a family—that he was working *with*

his leaders, and not merely *for* them. He shared that he felt part of a circle and support

group, where there were no hierarchical lines, and leadership humility demonstrated

through numerous acts of service. Cindy recounted an experience where she felt chosen,

stretched, believed in, and invested in by her supervisor. Supervisor commitment to her

development made her feel empowered, as he outlined a clear path for development, clear

expectations, and consistent follow-through relative to the set growth targets. Raul shared

about feeling engaged through events which facilitate opportunities for conversation,

connection, and interaction. "Just the fact that you get to talk to other people within the

company." Other participants shared their experiences involving recognition (individual

and team), feedback exchange, personal connection (not just professional), and feeling a

part of something bigger.

Experiences with disengagement. Participant experiences with disengagement

reflected the opposite of their experiences with high levels of engagement. Participants

shared stories of isolation, disconnection, not feeling valued, and reduction to a role or

"number" in the organization. On several occasions, participants referenced

disengagement as related to the absence of team or fractured teams. Alisa shared that disengagement for her occurs "when you are not involved anymore in some activities when you see your team is a part, and are doing something powerful or something that you could do…tasks or something like that. You will definitely lose engagement." A few participants shared they felt disengaged when their compensation did not match their perceived contribution, relating to not feeling valued.

Employee engagement impact on personal and professional life. During the interview process, participants shared about how personal employee engagement impacted other areas of their personal or professional life. Nine of the participants indicated that their levels of personal engagement affected other areas of their life, while only 2 participants reported it did not. Of those who stated engagement impacted other areas of their personal or professional life, participants shared about positive engagement fostering relationships, empowerment, motivation, inspiration, initiative, security, confidence, connection, joy, and fulfillment. In contrast, participants related disengagement to creating negative emotions, poor mood, and insecurity. Minerva shared about her inability to compartmentalize her emotions and feelings about work, stating "I cannot separate it, like, I go home, and then I feel better or worse. I feel I can do other things or I can just stay in bed, so that does affect me."

For the two participants who shared engagement did not impact other areas of their personal or professional lives, a sense of protection for others came through in their responses. One participant, who also expresses his current state of disengagement at work, shared the following:

> I'm not that type of person that talks about work outside the work environment. For instance, I do not discuss with my wife what goes on in the office, unless it

will impact her. Other than that, why? I mean, if I had a rough day because something didn't came the way it was supposed to, I don't need to tell her about that…I can disengage myself by the time I get home…I need my 15 minutes, 20 minutes travel time.

Leo also shared about the impact of disengagement on his personal and professional life:

I mean, on the work level of course, if you're not engaged, you're not motivated…your quality of work might not be as good as it could be. You might be doing what they are asking you to do…but not giving that extra mile, so to speak, that you would give by yourself…On the personal level, being disengaged makes your day might be more complicated, more difficult, and when you get home, of course, that affects your relationship with your kids, with your wife.

RQ3: What do Latino employees at a major global specialty retailer perceive to be effective and meaningful drivers of employee engagement?

The third research question aligned with interview questions 7, 8, and 9 (Appendix D). This final research question was designed to uncover antecedents to engagement and disengagement in the workplace among the participant population, as well as the development of recommendations to drive engagement by exploring the individual perspectives. Shuck and Wollard (2011) defined employee engagement antecedents as "constructs, strategies, or conditions that precede the development of employee engagement and that come before an organization or manager reaps the benefits of engagement-related outputs" (p. 434). Coding of the interview transcripts resulted in the emergence of three key themes relative to engagement and disengagement in the workplace: workplace relationships, feeling valued, and leadership communication.

Drivers of workplace engagement. Regarding drivers of workplace engagement, multiple participants shared that positive relationships, a sense of feeling valued and important, and frequent and effective communication, were critical factors to their positive engagement. Participants shared joyfully about familial-like relationships in the

workplace, positive connections where they were a part of a team, individual conversations of value and respect, and consideration for different needs and desires (both personally and professionally). Related to workplace relationships, participants shared how much their feelings of personal value and contribution related to their engagement experiences, recounting how individualization of conversations, reward and recognition, and empowerment through elevated and vital work assignments helped create a sense of meaning and drive higher engagement levels. Finally, a resounding theme in the research was the importance of clear and concise leadership communication, in which individual and organizational goals and vision are shared with regularity, and tied back to individual contribution and performance. High levels of transparent and authentic communication were very important relative to the positive engagement experiences of the participants.

In many ways, the essence of the narrative around engagement was about the ability to be seen, valued, and heard for the authentic self. Feeling valued came up time and time again in the interview data. Upon deeper reflection and immersion in the data, the meaning of value emerged in the context of having a voice, validation through dialogue and supporting behaviors, and feeling worthy. Many of the sentiments and narratives around value or being valued reflected stories of feeling loved and included.

Drivers of workplace disengagement. It is not surprising, that when asked about drivers of disengagement, participants referenced the absence of drivers they had previously associated with positive engagement. When asked to recount examples of disengagement in the workplace, participant tonality and body language changed. Relative to workplace relationships, participants shared about feelings of disconnection,

isolation, and loneliness. They shared about not feeling part of a team, and not having closeness or camaraderie with fellow employees. Relative to feeling valued and disengagement, participants shared about others not appreciating their diverse perspective, culture, or individual wants and needs. They shared about doing unfulfilling work or getting assigned to projects that do not align with their strengths and passions. They shared about not being able to contribute at a high level and feeling like "just a number." Relative to the theme of leadership communication and disengagement, participants recounted stories of feeling "left in the dark," or "out of the loop." They referenced closed-door meetings, unapproachable leaders, lack of transparency and directive versus collaborative leadership. Lack of organizational vision and clear direction for the future contributed to feelings of disengagement among the participants.

Recommendations for improving workplace engagement

Given the three key themes emerging from the data, recommendations for improving workplace engagement focus on relationship-building, instilling value, and effective leadership communication. Reilly (2014) found that actively disengaged employees tend to act out their unhappiness at work and undermine the accomplishments of their colleagues. In general, participant facial expressions and body language improved when given the opportunity to share positive personal employee engagement experiences. In contrast, when asked to recount the personal experiences of disengagement in the workplace, negative emotions surfaced which reflected sadness, frustration, disappointment, and discouragement. Tonality and body language shifted to mirror the experiences recounted by the participants.

Application of Findings and Conclusions to the Problem Statement

Variability in how engagement was defined could make engagement strategies all the more difficult for organizational leaders and practitioners to implement, particularly if the approach is "cookie cutter." Tools and measures which focus on the efficacy of workplace relationships, feeling valued in the workplace and effective leadership communication may be helpful in the implementation of more effective engagement strategies, particularly across workplaces with a high population of Latino employees.

Application to Leadership

The research findings are notable in addressing the specific research problems and research questions. The general problem is that traditional employee engagement models (those that depend upon broad organizational engagement measures and one-size-fits-all strategies) are failing. The specific leadership problem is that often, human resources leaders do not consider individual drivers of engagement when developing and implementing organizational engagement strategies. Wagner (2015) concluded that organizational adoption of one-size-fits-all approaches has yielded poor results. The three themes that emerged from the research substantiate the need for individualized engagement approaches that rely on relationship-building, creating a sense of value and belonging, and communicating effectively with individual employees. The resulting data also supports Wagner's (2015) suggestion that many organizational leaders fail to understand that each employee should be managed, developed, coached and engaged individually, as people of varying race, gender, and age, are more different then they are similar.

Lackluster employee engagement scores demonstrate the need for innovation and transformation in approaches for improvement. As workforce demographics continue to evolve and become more diverse, it is imperative that leaders recognize a focus on effective engagement as a competitive advantage in organizational and human resource leadership. Instead of overarching programs and initiatives which focus on general surveys and action steps, organizational leaders should consider the implementation of unique and innovative strategies which rely on leadership development in relationship-building, connection, and effective communication.

Recommendations for Action

Recommendations for action focus specifically on organizational leadership. Based on the data and findings from this qualitative research, three recommendations for action are: 1) focus on selecting the right organizational leaders, 2) provide leaders training and development to support engagement efforts, and 3) hold leaders accountable for the engagement of those they lead.

Focus on Selecting the Right Organizational Leaders

Poor employee engagement is a leadership problem. Often, employee engagement efforts involved merely action steps related to events or initiatives, as opposed robust interrogation of leadership behaviors and organizational culture. In their study on engagement and leadership, Radda, Majidadi, and Akanno (2015) concluded that leadership itself is the critical driver of engagement outcomes. Similarly, Romans and Jeff (2016) found that organizations with high levels of employee engagement have committed leaders who understand the importance of each interaction they have to the overall culture and engagement of individuals. Thus, organizational leaders and HR

practitioners should consider an evaluation of the current talent selection process to ensure a heavy emphasis on hiring leaders who have demonstrated a strong ability to drive engagement. This process may include personality assessments, emotional intelligence evaluations, extensive reference checks, and revised interview questions which focus on soft leadership skills.

Emotional intelligence (EI) is one area hiring managers may consider assessing as part of the talent selection process for organizational leadership. Emerging research conducted by Vandana and Rao (2017) suggests the emotional intelligence of leaders (those with high emotional quotients) may be more equipped to drive employee engagement. Furthermore, their recommendations included the use of tests to evaluate the emotional intelligence levels of applicants as selection criteria. Similarly, in outlining their conceptual model for positive emotional influence, McClellan and DiClementi (2017) found that emotional intelligence is considered part of overall leadership effectiveness, transformational leadership, and awareness leading to empathy and emotional attunement. Emotional intelligence is also highly related to self-awareness. In their study on authenticity in the workplace, Kuntz and Abott (2017) concluded that leadership encouragement of authenticity at work contributes to fostering connection, and improving individual and organizational performance. While the direct relationship between emotional intelligence and engagement is not defined herein, it is possible that positive levels of emotional intelligence may be indicative of leadership traits which also support positive levels of engagement in the workplace.

Provide Leaders with Training and Development to Support Engagement Efforts

While a renewed focus on hiring the right leaders may help counter failing one-size-fits-all engagement approaches, a focus on providing existing organizational leaders the essential development and growth to lead people and organizational engagement efforts are crucial. The three themes emerging from the data (workplace relationships, feeling valued, and leadership communication) are often overlooked, as they can be hard to measure and take action on when compared with other "black and white" financial key performance indicators (KPIs). Often, leaders are promoted through the ranks for delivery of financial metrics, performance objectives or critical milestones. The ability to connect with people and develop and engage talent is equally essential for organizational performance, but not always as tangible. The participant data suggests ongoing leadership training and development in a few key areas may help improve engagement: emotional intelligence (EI), cultural competence and awareness, and the ability to foster meaningful conversations.

Emotional intelligence. The development of emotional intelligence could focus on many different areas relative to improving the interpersonal skills of leaders. The following concepts emerging from the data indicate there might be some value in developing leadership soft skills: connection, relationships, inclusion, belonging, appreciation, and consideration of individual needs. The process for achieving mastery in emotional intelligence is still up for debate. However, there is relative alignment on the fact that a precursor to EI is emotional self-awareness, conceptualization, and application across various circumstances (McClellan & DiClementi, 2017). While there are several different models and assessments for measuring leadership emotional intelligence, what

most have in common is the consideration of both self-management and management of relationships. Ongoing learning and development programs targeted at growing EI among organizational leaders may help enable competencies needed for improving employee engagement.

Cultural competence and awareness. Several of the comments emerging from the participant data suggested leadership awareness of cultural values and a sense of belonging were directly related to engagement experiences. In recounting negative engagement experiences, one participant shared about feeling judged for her accent and unintentionally shamed for her religious and cultural beliefs. In recounting positive engagement experiences, several participants mentioned cultural values connected to their engagement—feelings of family, emotional connection, and relationships with other individuals in their same minority group. In suggesting considerations to improve organizational engagement efforts, Malia suggested having "social committees" to foster connection, while others shared about the desire for Latino employee resource groups developed to promote relationships and embrace cultural roots in the workplace.

Training and development efforts may focus on helping identify gaps in cultural competence, with intentional efforts to develop cultural awareness among leadership. With an increasingly diverse workforce population, the need to adapt and connect across cultural boundaries and demographics will become all the more critical for leadership efficacy. An understanding of underlying bias and implementation of processes to minimize bias in the workplace will help create a culture of inclusion, belonging, and appreciation for the unique experiences and backgrounds of each employee in an organization. In his research on authentic and adaptable leadership, Green (2017)

suggested an understanding of nuances specific to the cultural values of individual workplace associates could help improve the effectiveness of those leading engagement efforts.

Meaningful conversations. In discussing recommendations for organizational leaders to implement for improving engagement, several participants mentioned the value of meaningful conversations and engagement opportunities. Participant suggestions for improvement included more opportunities for candid feedback exchanges, frequent one-on-ones between employee and supervisor to discuss personal well-being, professional performance and growth opportunities, and sharing of organizational goals, performance, and direction. When asked if he had recommendations or advice for leaders to create a more engaged workplace, Juan said "Yes, probably having conversations like the one we're having right now, come from a Director, a manager level, or a VP level. I think it could be huge the type of work you're doing to have been advised by somebody…I work in direct relations with or under." His feedback related to the consistent themes and concepts around the importance of individual connections and conversations in overall organizational engagement. Gallup (2017) researchers substantiated the merit of this recommendation, concluding that frequent and effective performance conversations are critical for improving employee engagement.

Hold Leaders Accountable for Employee Engagement

One of the core ways to ensure progress and commitment to employee engagement investments is to ensure leaders model the way and are held accountable for the desired organizational engagement outcomes. If engagement is not a priority coupled with thoughtful reflection, adequate time and resources, and transparency in outcomes,

efforts may continue to fail. In an article on the connection between employee

engagement and relationship quality, Ahmed (2017) found that strong relationships

between leaders and their subordinates lead to higher employee engagement levels and

performance. Furthermore, holding leaders accountable for employee engagement

involves setting clear expectations, measuring and documenting progress, and rewarding

and elevating successful engagement efforts among individuals and in the organization.

      Set clear expectations. Employee engagement efforts must be clearly and

effectively communicated, and leadership expectations must be well-defined. In their

recommendations for building engagement cultures, Romans and Jeff (2016) suggested

that making engagement efforts come to life in any organization requires frequent (even

daily) discussion on efforts and multiple reviews of engagement data throughout the year

to align with organizational objectives and strategic planning. As with any corporate

initiative or focus, setting clear and concise expectations for organizational leadership is

essential. These expectations should include goals, quantitative and qualitative measures,

and both positive and negative consequences tied to the desired outcomes.

      Measure and document progress. Employee engagement should be considered a

key performance metric for leaders, particularly given the importance of engagement in

overall organizational performance. Gallup (2017) researchers concluded that

organizations with higher levels of engagement are those who hold their leaders

accountable for engagement outcomes. Leaders should be evaluated through both

qualitative and quantitative measures. Romans and Jeff (2016) concluded that a lack of

accountability for engagement outcomes prevents most companies from realizing the

fruits of their efforts and investments. They suggested these accountability efforts may

include development and completion of action plans, incorporation of engagement

measures in annual performance reviews, established and consistent frequency of

engagement conversations, and consideration of compensation relative to positive

engagement outcomes. Gallup (2017) researchers also suggested that while the

measurement is important, it is the consistency and follow through in behaviors that

impact sustainable engagement outcomes.

Feedback from multiple perspectives is another method for gathering constructive

qualitative input on leadership efficacy, strengths, and opportunities.

> Feedback is the fuel for growth. People, as well as an organization's capabilities, will decline over time without feedback to point out new opportunities…Effective leaders use feedback to continually build their capability. If an organization is to build a culture of feedback, then it must first be modeled by leaders. These leaders are not afraid of tough questions, comments or challenges. They seek out those who will engage in the tough conversations to build their capability and that of the organization (Romans & Jeff, 2016).

This type of feedback exchange is another way to build trust and transparency in an

organization. When employees see that their feedback is valued and taken seriously, they

are more likely to continue to provide input.

Reward and elevate. In a culture where engagement efforts thrive, reward and

recognition of leadership behaviors which drive engagement are essential. Reinforcement

and leadership modeling will help contribute to a vibrant culture where a focus on people

is at the forefront of the conversation on how to deliver sustained and robust

organizational performance. Romans and Jeff (2016) suggested engagement data should

also be used for internal succession planning, as the promotion of leaders who have

historically had poor engagement among small teams might be detrimental on a more

massive scale. It might create a perception within the organization that leaders earn

promotions without appropriate consideration of their ability to engage and lead teams through well-developed and effective interpersonal skills.

Recommendations for Further Research

The scholars summarized in the literature review illustrated the need to focus on improving employee engagement across multiple industries and organization, to enhance leadership efficacy and organizational performance. To continue learning about how to strengthen the effectiveness of employee engagement efforts, future researchers could focus on exploring more individualized engagement approaches, considering diverse employee backgrounds (cultural, social, political, etc.), and improving awareness of antecedents of employee engagement among minority populations and in the United States workforce, with particular focus on the Latino population. Saks and Gruman (2014) proposed that a lack of consensus regarding the meaning of employee engagement, coupled with challenges in measurement and research limitations make additional research and exploration all the more critical. The findings from this study support the need for improved employee engagement approaches—those which focus on individual relationships, connection, and consideration of individual needs and desires, instead of "cookie cutter" engagement actions. Several areas for future inquiry may include an extension of the research to other minority groups, rigorous quantitative analysis to define culture-specific antecedents of engagement across multiple populations, intervention research, and expansion of the inquiry across various industries and geographies.

Additional Minority Groups

One recommendation for future research includes conducting additional qualitative interviews with other minority groups. While this research study involved a Latino population, insights from further studies may shed light on how various groups define and experience engagement in the workplace. Workplace demographics are becoming more diverse, and leadership growth in the areas of cultural awareness and competence may be enabled by fostering a greater understanding of both similarities and differences across multiple subgroups. The research findings on Latino employee engagement in this research may be very similar to other populations or vastly different. On a smaller scale, organizational leaders may look at internal demographic data and consider current engagement efforts relative to cultural values to improve engagement efforts in their company. In their research on emerging trends and insights in employee engagement, Bakker and Albrecht (2018) suggested that additional research specific to various demographic groups may help create new and valuable learning for improving engagement strategies.

Quantitative Analysis of Culture-Specific Antecedent Variables

Another area for future research may include quantitative analysis to compare the core cultural values of minority groups with the efficacy of engagement efforts. It would be interesting to understand if there are engagement measures or questions that consistently score higher or lower across minority groups, to focus organizational efforts for more effective outcomes. This data would be helpful for HR and executive leaders in crafting innovative engagement approaches. While the key themes in this research on Latino employee engagement were workplace relationships, feeling valued, and

leadership communication, key themes connected to employee engagement across other minority groups may be very different. Further researcher evaluation of quantitative data may also reveal additional areas of qualitative inquiry.

Intervention

Given the apparent challenge of stagnant employee engagement levels across multiple industries, organizations, and geographies, intervention research may present itself as a viable alternative to one-size-fits-all engagement strategies. In their engagement research, Bailey, Madden, Alfes, and Fletcher (2017) concluded that very few studies had been completed on interventions to drive employee engagement. One possible area or for an intervention study could be the implementation of a new engagement approach in an organization with a high Latino population. Where engagement is measured, and outcomes are less than desirable, leaders could craft an intervention to implement a new engagement approach across a representative community in the organization. Post-intervention, leaders or researchers could measure engagement to determine if an engagement strategy focused on workplace relationships, feeling valued, and leadership communications produce higher engagement levels in the test population versus the control group.

Expand Research to Multiple Industries and Geographies

Lastly, the research design utilized for this study could be expanded to multiple industries and organizations to determine if the emerging concepts and themes are relevant beyond this Latino population. Since there is still very little research on cultural antecedents to employee engagement, there is an abundance of opportunity to create a new context and insight through research related to minority groups in different

industries. It would be interesting to explore if antecedents are impacted by physical geography as well. For instance, do experiences with employee engagement change for Latino employees when they are in a Latino country versus in the United States? Are there specific cultural drivers of engagement which become much heavily weighted based on whether the employees are in their native country versus immigrants in a "foreign" land? To date, there have been many employee engagement studies done in specified industries or countries, but the research has not been widespread or impactful enough to enable improvement of employee engagement more broadly. Perhaps additional research on cultural drivers of engagement in different industries and geographies may be valuable for generating insight to improve engagement levels more broadly.

Concluding Statement

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore employee engagement through the lived experiences of a group of first-generation Latino immigrants employed at a major global retailer. The intent was to create meaning and uncover context relative to employee engagement and potential cultural considerations for organizational engagement approaches, considering engagement strategies as a whole, have failed to drive higher levels of organizational engagement. Based on the findings of this study, and the review of relevant engagement literature, engagement among the participant population surfaced three critical themes for additional consideration and exploration: workplace relationships, feeling valued, and leadership communication.

Gaps in employee engagement efforts and results connected to these efforts are a real problem in organizations. Despite perceived leadership interest and implementation

of engagement initiatives and actions, employee engagement scores levels continue to be low among multiple industries and organizations (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Increasing the diversity of the workforce and global influence present a challenge to already lackluster employee engagement strategies. Leaders must consider a paradigm shift in engagement efforts, transitioning from one-size-fits-all efforts to transformational leadership approaches that focus on individual leadership development and skill-building in interpersonal skills, relationship-building, connection, and cultural awareness.

Given the potential impact positive employee engagement has on individual and organizational performance, it is time that corporate leaders and human resources practitioners shift how they invest in employee engagement. Passive, or traditional, approaches to engagement efforts will likely continue to yield similar unfavorable results to those historically measured. The data presented in this study will help leaders: a) recognize the importance of employee engagement in organizational performance, b) understand the criticality of not addressing poor engagement results, and c) consider the value of individualized engagement experiences influenced by cultural values. Following decades of growing awareness and several efforts to improve employee engagement, albeit, with varying results, it is time to try other approaches to improve employee engagement. Additional research is a separate avenue that can lead to informing new approaches regarding cultural antecedents and leadership accountability for engagement outcomes. While failure to take different actions for organizational engagement efforts may result in ongoing organizational employee engagement disappointments, leadership implementation of new and innovative approaches should yield different and pleasantly surprising results of improved engagement and performance.

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APPENDIX A
CITYU RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

CityUniversity
of Seattle

School of Applied Leadership

Dear Participant:

My name is Emerald Lopez. I am currently working on my doctoral dissertation as the final step to achieve my doctorate degree at City University of Seattle, Washington, in the United States. The topic of my dissertation is employee engagement; this research will explore the lived experiences and perspectives of Latino employees. Greater understanding of cultural variables relative to employee engagement could prove beneficial for organizations in other countries, diverse organizations, or those with an international presence.

I am contacting participants who will be able to participate in an interview. The interview has been planned to last 30-45 minutes.

I, _____, agree to participate in the following research project to be conducted by **Emerald Lopez**, student, in the Ed. D. Program. I understand this research study has been approved by the City University of Seattle Institutional Review Board. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form, signed by all persons involved. I further acknowledge that I have been provided an overview of the research protocol as well as a detailed explanation of the informed consent process.

Title of Project:

Employee engagement: Exploring the lived experiences and perspectives of Latino employees through hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry at a major global retailer.

Name and Title of Researcher(s): Emerald Lopez
Faculty Supervisor: Joel L. Domingo, Ed.D.
Department: School of Applied Leadership
Telephone: (1) 206.239.4770
E-mail: jdomingo@cityu.edu

Purpose of Study:

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore the role of cultural values in shaping the attitudes, beliefs, and work experiences of Latinos employed at a major global specialty retailer.

Research Participation:
I understand I am being asked to participate in this study in one or more of the following ways (the checked options below apply):

☒   Respond to in-person and/or telephone Interview questions;
☐   Answer written questionnaire(s);
☐   Participate in other data gathering activities, specifically, _____
I further understand that my involvement is voluntary and I may refuse to participate or withdraw my participation at any time without negative consequences. I have been advised that I may request a copy of

the final research study report. Should I request a copy, I understand I may be asked to pay the costs of photocopying and mailing.

Confidentiality

I understand that participation is confidential to the limits of applicable privacy laws. No one except the faculty researcher or student researcher, his/her supervisor and Program Coordinator (or Program Director) will be allowed to view any information or data collected whether by questionnaire, interview and/or other means. If the student researcher's cooperating classroom teacher will also have access to raw data, the following box will be checked. ☒ All data (the questionnaires, audio/video tapes, typed records of the interview, interview notes, informed consent forms, computer discs, any backup of computer discs and any other storage devices) are kept locked and password protected by the researcher. The research data will be stored for 5 years. At the end of that time all data of whatever nature will be permanently destroyed. The published results of the study will contain data from which no individual participant can be identified.

Signatures

I have carefully reviewed and understand this consent form. I understand the description of the research protocol and consent process provided to me by the researcher. My signature on this form indicates that I understand to my satisfaction the information provided to me about my participation in this research project. My signature also indicates that I have been apprised of the potential risks involved in my participation. Lastly, my signature indicates that I agree to participate as a research subject.

My consent to participate does not waive my legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, and/or City University of Seattle from their legal and professional responsibilities with respect to this research. I understand I am free to withdraw from this research project at any time. Given that this research is about employee engagement, there is a potential for you to be distressed about the quality of engagement and the emotional impact this may have on you. At any time, you may choose to end the interview or withdraw from participation for any reason.

I further understand that I may ask for clarification or new information throughout my participation at any time during this research.

Participant's Name: _____

 Please Print

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: Emerald Lopez

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

If I have any questions about this research, I have been advised to contact the researcher and/or his/her supervisor, as listed on page one of this consent form. Should I have any concerns about the way I have been treated as a research participant, I may contact the following individual(s):

Dr. Joel L. Domingo, Associate Professor/Associate Program Director, School of Applied Leadership, City University of Seattle, at 521 Wall St. Seattle, WA 98121

APPENDIX B
PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER AND SELECTION SURVEY

I am contacting you to let you know about an opportunity to participate in a research study about employee engagement. This study is being conducted by Emerald Lopez, Luxottica employee, and Doctoral Candidate at City University of Seattle. This study will explore Latino employee engagement and Latino perspectives on drivers of employee engagement, in order to inform leaders, practitioners, and scholars of employee engagement strategies. While a significant amount of research has been conducted on employee engagement, and various approaches for improving engagement levels, there is a deficiency of research to inform organizational engagement strategies relative to cultural considerations. The Latino population is the fastest growing minority group in the United States workforce. As such, an understanding of the experiences and perspectives of Latino employees may provide insight into considerations for organizational engagement strategies.

The researcher received approval from the City University of Seattle Institutional Review Board (IRB) and administrators at this organization prior to conducting the research. You were identified as a potential participant because you are an employee at Luxottica Retail. You are receiving this solicitation because you are a personal contact of the researcher, or because you were referred as someone who may be potentially qualified and/or interested in participating. You may have also received this solicitation via email forward from one of your contacts. The participant selection survey is hosted on the online platform *SurveyMonkey*. Please utilize the following link to determine if you are eligible to participate in the survey, and to indicate your willingness to do so: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/9TFRC6B . Your expression of interest does not mean you are automatically selected for this study. Agreement to be contacted or a request for more information does not obligate you to participate in any study.

If you would like additional information about this study, please call Emerald Lopez at 513-262-0721.

Thank you again for considering this research opportunity.

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

I am Emerald Lopez, an employee here at the organization, and a Doctoral Candidate at City University of Seattle. I am interested in exploring the lived experiences of Latino employee engagement, key drivers of employee engagement among Latino employees, and how organizational leaders can be more effective in driving employee engagement. Your participation and cooperation is important, because your responses will be compiled and synthesized with the other responses, to explore themes emerging from the lived experiences and perceptions of Latino employee engagement. The questions will focus specifically on your experiences and perceptions. No specific questions will be asked about the organization itself, or leaders within the organization. Every attempt will be made to ensure you feel comfortable and are able to share freely about your experiences regarding this topic.

Today, I will ask you some questions about your experiences and perceptions of employee engagement. I will take minimal notes capture key ideas for additional probing questions or clarification on what was stated. A recording will also be made using a digital voice recorder. I will ask to schedule a second interview only if additional clarification or context is needed to understand context or meanings.

All information gathered will be treated as confidential. No personal identification information such as names will be used in any reports arising out of this research. Participation in any research study may involve a loss of privacy. Information you provide about your experiences and opinions will be recorded, but your name will not be used in any reports of the information provided. No quotes or other results arising from your participation in this study will be included in any reports, even anonymously, without your agreement. A transcript of each interview will be stored and retained in digital format. Notes will be taken in a physical research journal. All written consent forms and documents, including transcription and researcher notes, will be scanned and saved to computer files. Pseudonyms will be assigned for each participant, for the purposes of ensuring anonymity. I will do my best to make sure that the personal information gathered for this survey is kept private.

Today, the interview will last about 30-45 minutes. You can decide to stop participating at any time. Just tell me right away if you wish to stop the interview.

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information that you share may help human resource and organizational leaders better understand how to improve employee engagement strategies. You are free to choose not to participate in the study. If you decide not to take part in this study, there will be no penalty to you. There are no costs to you for taking part in this study. You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

Taking part in this study is your choice. If you decide to take part in this study, you may change your mind at any time. No matter what decision you take, there will be no penalty to you in any way.
You can talk to the researcher about any questions or concerns you have about this survey. Contact Emerald Lopez at 513-262-0721.

You may keep this information sheet if you wish. Participation is voluntary. You have the right to decline to participate in the study, or to withdraw from it at any point without penalty. If you do not wish to participate in the study, you should inform the researcher now. If you do wish to participate in this study, you should tell the researcher now. If you do not agree to quotes or other results arising from your participation in the study being included, even anonymously, in any reports about the study, please tell the researcher now.

APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Warm up:
Can I ask some details about you and your job?
Job Title _____
Highest Educational Grade attained ___ __
Years worked at this organization |__|__|yrs|__|__|mths
How old are you?   □ Under 30yrs □ 30-40yrs □ Over 40yrs

Research Question	Corresponding Interview Questions
RQ1: How do Latino employees at a major global specialty retailer define employee engagement?	1. How familiar are you with the concept of employee engagement? 2. How do you define employee engagement? 3. Tell me about employee engagement and what it means to you.
RQ2: How do Latino employees at a major global specialty retailer describe their personal employee engagement experiences?	4. Tell me about a time or experience in the workplace in which you felt you had the highest levels of engagement at work. 5. Tell me about a time or experience in the workplace in which you felt disengaged. 6. Does your personal employee engagement impact other areas of your personal or professional life? If so, how so?
RQ3: What do Latino employees at a major global specialty retailer perceive to be effective and meaningful drivers of employee engagement?	7. In general, what makes you feel more engaged in the workplace? 8. In general, what makes you feel disengaged at work? 9. What could your leaders or organization do to help you feel more engaged in the workplace?

Closure
- Thank you to interviewee
- Reassure confidentiality
- Ask permission to follow-up

APPENDIX E
CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT FOR TRANSCRIPTIONIST

CityUniversity
of Seattle

Research Study Title: EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: EXPLORING THE LIVED

EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES OF LATINO EMPLOYEES THROUGH

QUALITATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY AT A MAJOR GLOBAL SPECIALTY

RETAILER

1. I, _____ transcriptionist, agree to maintain full
confidentiality of all research data received from the research team related to this research study.

2. I will hold in strictest confidence the identity of any individual that may be revealed during the
transcription of interviews or in any associated documents.

3. I will not make copies of any audio-recordings, video-recordings, or other research data, unless
specifically requested to do so by the researcher.

4. I will not provide the research data to any third parties without the client's consent.

5. I will store all study-related data in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession.
All video and audio recordings will be stored in an encrypted format.

6. All data provided or created for purposes of this agreement, including any back-up records,
will be returned to the research team or permanently deleted. When I have received confirmation
that the transcription work I performed has been satisfactorily completed, any of the research data
that remains with me will be returned to the research team or destroyed, pursuant to the
instructions of the research team.

7. I understand that the researcher and City University of Seattle have the right to take legal
action against any breach of confidentiality that occurs in my handling of the research data.

Transcriber's name (printed) _____

Transcriber's signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX F
RESEARCH QUESTION CODES AND CONCEPTUAL CATEGORIES

Codes and Conceptual Categories from Research Question #1

Descriptive Code	# Occurrences	First Impression Code	# Occurrences	Conceptual Categories
grow/growing/growth	15	employee needs	9	
team	12	relationships	6	**1) Opportunities for growth**
happy	9	opportunities/exposure	5	
help	6	considered as a person	5	**2) Team, connection, relationships**
enjoy	6	sameness	5	
fun	6	part of bigger picture	5	**3) Enjoyment in the workplace**
needs	6	minority groups support	4	
values	5	part of goals	4	**4) Consideration of individual needs**
commitment	4	give your best	3	
feedback	4	values ideas	3	**5) Sense of belonging**
involved	4	top-down	3	
compromise	4	results-orientation	2	**6) Connection to organizational goals**
incentive(s)	3	give and take	2	
loyalty	3	compensation	2	**7) Minority resource groups**
brand	3	solicit feeback from employees	2	
meetings	3	inclusion	2	
group	3			
connected	3			
committed	2			
best	2			
passion	2			
payment	2			
events	2			
respect	2			
family	2			
included	2			
relationships	2			
environment	2			
quality	2			
welcome	2			

Codes and Conceptual Categories from Research Question #2

Descriptive Code	# Occurrences	First Impression Code	# Occurrences	Conceptual Categories
team	15	prejudice, discrimination, unfair	12	
work	8	feeling valued	9	**1) Inclusion**
family	6	part of big picture	9	
motivation	6	part of team	9	**2) Team, connection, relationships**
connection	6	disconnected	6	
transition	6	ambiguity	6	**3) Sense of belonging**
trust	5	contribution	5	
developed/development	5	work together	5	**4) Sense of purpose**
empowered	4	relationships	5	
unethical	4	uncertainty	5	**5) Security**
people	3	make something happen	4	
involved	3	empowered	4	**6) Opportunities for growth**
(un)appreciated	4	able to influence	4	
personal	2	events	4	**7) Contribution**
brands	2	included `	4	
feedback	2	excluded	4	
respect	2	poor communication	4	
goal	2	exciting work	3	
tools	2	opportunities	3	
hard	2	personal or religious beliefs	3	
growth	2	lack of job security	3	
		lack of trust	3	
		no rapport	3	
		compensation	2	
		celebration	2	
		no activities	2	
		impersonal	2	
		overworked	2	

Codes and Emerging Themes from Research Question #3

Descriptive Code	# Occurrences	First Impression Code	# Occurrences	Conceptual Categories
team	12	valued	20	
meetings	10	relationships	14	**1) Connection and relationships**
love(d)	10	considered	13	
open	7	recognition	13	**2) Sense of belonging**
help	7	contribution	12	
family	7	inclusion	11	**3) Sense of purpose**
communication	6	useful	10	
connected	6	team	10	**4) Opportunities for growth**
grow/growth/growing	6	communication	9	
culture	6	goals	8	**5) Communication and transparency**
positive	6	empowered	8	
feedback	6	trusted	8	**6) Appreciation/recognition**
respect/respected	5	diverse	8	
opportunity/opportunities	5	transparency	8	
included	5	honesty	8	
passion	5	ambiguity/uncertainty	7	
environment	4	celebrate other cultures	6	
learning/learn	4	one-on-ones with supervisor	6	
opinion	4	growth	5	
valued	4	flexibility	5	
challenges	4	belonging	4	
appreciate (d)	4	unity	4	
change(s)	4	corporate social responsibility	3	
together	4	compensation	3	
different	3	being real	2	
fair	3			
clarity	3			
why	3			