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Successful Strategies for Reducing Middle Management Turnover in the Automotive Industry

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Nicole King-Daniel

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
2020

Abstract

Successful Strategies for Reducing Middle Management Turnover
in the Automotive Industry

by

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MS, University of the West Indies, 2008

BS, Andrews University, 2000

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

June 2020

Abstract

Employee turnover at the middle management level can cost an organization up to 250% of an employee's annual compensation in replacement cost. Identifying the strategies that business leaders use to mitigate turnover at the middle management level is fundamental to business sustainability. Grounded in Blanchard and Hersey's situational leadership theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore leadership strategies used by automotive leaders to mitigate middle management turnover. The participants comprised of 6 senior leaders within the automotive industry located in the north-eastern region of Trinidad, who successfully mitigated turnover in their organizations at the middle management level. Data were collected from semistructured interviews and company documents. Yin's approach was used to analyze the data. Four themes emerged: (a) coaching, (b) performance-related pay, (c) career growth and development, and (d) person-job alignment. The results of this study may provide leaders with the tools and knowledge needed to mitigate turnover at the middle management level. Implications for positive social change include the potential for job stability and job creation as a result of business sustainability. Increased sustainability may result in job security for the firm's employees, therein positively influencing the livelihood of these employees and generating favorable economic and social impacts on the families within these communities.

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Dedication

I dedicate the accomplishment of this doctoral study to Almighty God. His continued guidance and love for me have allowed me to achieve this milestone. To my husband, John, you are my rock and my protector. Your support, love, and commitment to helping me fulfill my dreams and overcome life's challenges are appreciated more than words can express. I love you forever and for always! To my mom, stepdad, grandmother, godfather, and my younger siblings, here on earth and in heaven. Thank you for always raising me above the clouds. I sincerely hope that with this achievement, I continue to inspire you and to fill you with pride. I dedicate this to all of you.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Employee turnover is a frequent and critical problem for many organizations. Excessive turnover has an adverse effect on businesses, including increased operational expenditure, decreased productivity, and reduced financial performance (Tse, Huang, & Lam, 2013). Accordingly, developing effective retention strategies that result in reducing employee turnover and retaining key talent is a fundamental imperative for organizational leaders (Dwesini, 2019; Puangyoykeaw & Nishide, 2015). Talented employees enable high organizational performance and maintain a firm's competitive advantage (Mazurkiewicz, 2017). Khoele and Daya (2014) agreed, adding that in an increasingly global competitive landscape, skilled knowledge workers, particularly in management positions, create the competitive advantage that organizational leaders depend on for success.

The competitive automotive industry, driven by higher profitability and increased market share, has significantly increased the level of uncertainty and risks that pervades the industry (Toma, Marinescu, & Burcea, 2015). Such challenges amplify the need for automotive industry leaders to implement strategies that decrease turnover and enhance the retention of key talent and critical manpower skills to remain competitive (Mitrovska & Eftimov, 2016). The goal of this study was to explore the leadership strategies that automotive leaders used to mitigate middle management turnover. Blanchard and Hersey's situational leadership theory was used to explore the phenomenon. The tenet of situational leadership theory is that no unique leadership style exists; as situations change, leadership style should adapt to meet the changing needs of their followers and

the demands of the situation (Blanchard & Hersey, 1970; Bos-Nehles, Bondarouk, & Nijenhuis, 2017).

Background of the Problem

Since 1918, the impact of employee turnover on firm performance has enthralled the interest of researchers (Li, Lee, Mitchell, Hom, & Griffeth, 2016). Within the automotive industry, employee turnover continues to have a detrimental impact on cost, time, and replacement efforts (Meddour, Rosli, Majid, Auf, & Aman, 2016). High employee turnover is also attributable to decreased customer brand image, reduced consumer loyalty, diminished competitive advantage, and lower firm profitability (Walsh, 2016). Effective retention strategies are an essential component of an integrated talent management framework (Takawira, Coetzee, & Schreuder, 2014). Puangyoykeaw and Nishide (2015) noted that through the loss of talented human capital and the possible leakage of firm know-how to competitors, businesses could experience significant losses.

Furthermore, Darkow (2015) noted that top management does not possess all the requisite means to successfully develop and implement a strategy. The expertise and knowledge that needs to be leveraged reside with middle managers. Middle managers initiate, champion, and execute the organization's strategic plan to achieve financial success (Ou, Seo, Choi, & Hom, 2017). Leadership style can be a determining factor of firm performance (Yanney, 2014). Moreover, ineffective leadership styles can influence employee turnover and affect overall company productivity (Perez & Mirabella, 2013).

Problem Statement

High employee turnover poses a significant problem for many organizational leaders resulting in substantial costs which could be detrimental to business performance (Meddour et al., 2016). The financial impact for employers based on turnover costs associated with the departure of an employee can escalate to 150% of an employee's annual earnings, and as much as 250% for managerial positions or positions that require either a specific qualification or unique skill (Mitrovska & Eftimov, 2016). The general business problem was that leaders in the automotive industry often lack an awareness of the negative impact of leadership style on employee turnover. The specific business problem was that some automotive leaders lack the leadership strategies for mitigating middle management turnover.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the leadership strategies that automotive leaders used to mitigate middle management turnover. The targeted population comprised of six senior leaders within the automotive industry located in the north-eastern region of Trinidad. The implications for positive social change may include increased job retention and improved employee well-being within a supportive work environment. Job retention also facilitates a better standard of living for families of employees providing for their economic, social, and educational needs. High turnover rates at any level can contribute to increased poverty levels and intensified criminal activities in communities where the business operates. As such, the outcomes of

the study may alleviate societal misfortunes consequent on job turnover or business failure, and improve the welfare of employees, their families, and communities.

Nature of the Study

According to Almalki (2016), a researcher must select the methodology that is appropriate for their research study. The qualitative method was suitable for this study as qualitative researchers can draw meaning from the experiences and insights of participants, providing a deeper understanding of the underlying reasons and motivations for the problem rather than on challenging established theory (Almalki, 2016; McCusker & Gunaydin, 2014). Moreover, researchers who engaged qualitative methods in exploring leadership research allowed for a more comprehensive account of the leader's behavior within the organizational context (Antunes & Franco, 2016). Qualitative researchers seek to narrate and elucidate the participants' account of the phenomenon, and as a result, grounds the research outcomes in the participants' lived experiences (Sutton & Austin, 2015; Wadams & Park, 2018). Consequently, neither a quantitative nor mixed method approach was suitable, as the focus of this study was on gathering comprehensive, exploratory, and narrative data that informed the research findings. Quantitative researchers examine the relationship between two or more variables, using numeric analysis of the data collected to test these relations via hypotheses (Almalki, 2016; Landrum & Garza, 2015). The mixed methods approach can also be challenging for researchers, requiring skills in both qualitative and quantitative approaches, and the collection of both numeric data and narrative data to inform the research analysis and findings (Almalki, 2016; McCusker & Gunaydin, 2014). Additionally, the mixed method

approach is time-consuming and complicates the research process (Sadan, 2014).

Consequently, I did not use the mixed method approach due to the complexity of using both research methodologies, simultaneously, and the time and financial investment, which may have been required to complete this study.

Within qualitative research, four main research designs support the collection and analysis of data obtained from the research questions. The four core designs include phenomenology, ethnography, narrative design, and case study (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2015). Yin (2017) noted that case study research is an investigation and analysis of either a single case, or multiple cases, intended to depict the complexity and inimitable nature of the research subject. Using a case study design, researchers generate relevant insights of the phenomenon, within a real-life context, providing for comprehensive empirical narratives and potential theory development based on a level of flexibility that is not readily offered by other qualitative approaches (Yin, 2017). The other qualitative research designs were unsuitable based on the intent and focus of this study. According to Campbell (2014), phenomenology researchers seek to understand the nature and meaning of the lived experiences of individuals. Saunders et al. (2015) stated that researchers use ethnography to study a cultural phenomenon in a natural setting. Finally, Campbell (2014) noted that researchers who undertake narrative inquiry design focus on personal accounts or storytelling to preserve the chronology of events. Ultimately, I selected a multiple case study design to explore successful strategies that automotive leaders used to mitigate middle management turnover.

Research Question

The central research question for this study was: “What leadership strategies do automotive leaders use to mitigate middle management turnover?”

Interview Questions

To answer the central research question, I conducted face-to-face semistructured interviews to garner valuable and comprehensive responses from participants using the following interview questions:

1. What leadership strategies have you used to mitigate middle management turnover?
2. Based on your experiences, what factors influenced staff turnover at the middle management level?
3. How have you assessed the effectiveness of your strategies for mitigating middle management turnover at your company?
4. Of the strategies applied to mitigate middle management turnover, which strategy, if any, do you believe was most effective?
5. What strategy has been the least effective in mitigating middle management turnover?
6. What other information can you add that will provide a deeper understanding of what strategies are successful for reducing middle management turnover?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was Blanchard and Hersey’s situational leadership theory. Initially theorised by Blanchard and Hersey as the life cycle theory of

leadership and later renamed the situational leadership theory, the theorists proffered that the theory provides a leader with an understanding of the relationship between effective leadership style, and the maturity level of their subordinates (Blanchard & Hersey, 1970; Blanchard, Zigarmi, & Nelson, 1993). Consequently, leadership effectiveness should increase across different individuals and groups within the workplace (Blanchard & Hersey, 1970). Blanchard and Hersey asserted that the fundamental tenet of situational leadership theory is that no single-best leadership style exists (Zigarmi & Roberts, 2017). With no single-best leadership style, any one of four leadership approaches, namely, directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating; representing different combinations of directive and supportive behaviors, can affect the leader's diagnostic ability, flexibility, and effectiveness across different situations (Marques, 2015; Zigarmi & Roberts, 2017).

Bos-Nehles et al. (2017) added that with no ideal leadership style, leaders can adapt their behavior to meet the demands of each unique situation aligned to the task direction, relational support, and readiness of the employee. When leaders match their leadership style with the requirements of the situation, as well as the employee's maturity and readiness, the employees' job satisfaction and performance improve, and organizational commitment increases (Bosse, Duell, Memon, Treur, & van der Wal, 2017; Marques, 2015; Zigarmi & Roberts, 2017). Although Chen and Silverthorne (2005) challenged this view concluding that matched leadership style and subordinate readiness did not ensue higher level of job satisfaction and employee performance, situational leadership theory could provide more in-depth insights into what strategies automotive leaders used to successfully mitigate middle management turnover.

Operational Definitions

To appreciate the valuable contribution of the study, the following operational definitions are provided to ensure the readers understand the terms used in the study. These definitions are not found in a basic academic dictionary and are from scholarly sources.

Job satisfaction: Job satisfaction is defined as a “pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job and job experience.”

(Eliophotou-Menon & Ioannou, 2016, p. 18).

Middle manager: A middle manager is an individual occupying a functional specialty, having a minimum of two levels of staff reporting to them, and possessing the capacity to motivate others, implement change, create strategic initiatives, and enable or impede strategic implementation (Darkow, 2015; Heyden, Sidhu, & Volberda, 2018).

Organizational commitment: Organizational commitment, an extension of job satisfaction, denotes the degree to which an employee identifies with the organization, their level of engagement, and the intensity of their intentions to leave the business (Ćulibrk, Delić, Mitrović, & Ćulibrk, 2018).

Voluntary turnover: Voluntary turnover occurs when an employee exits a company based on his or her own decision, thereby exhibiting a high preference for leaving and having high control over the choice (Li et al., 2016; Sharma, 2016).

Leadership style: Leadership style is defined as a combination of leadership behaviors adapted by a leader to achieve a goal or perform a function (Alonderiene & Majauskaite, 2015).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are inferences or concepts a researcher deems to be factual before engaging in academic study and consequently, not immediately verifiable (Gallop, 2011; Yin, 2017). The main assumption of this study was that the study participants can adequately articulate what leadership strategies they applied to successfully mitigate middle management turnover in their organizations. Another assumption was that the study participants will readily consent to participate in the study and would also answer the questions truthfully and candidly. A final assumption was that organizational statistics and documentation that would support my exploration of the phenomenon, would be available and current.

Limitations

Limitations represent uncontrollable threats to the internal and external validity of the study (Connelly, 2013). Some research limitations can occur when researchers attempt to balance scientific rigor inquiry with reality (Connelly, 2013). The first limitation was the utilization of situational leadership theory to explore strategies that automotive leaders used to mitigate middle management turnover. Other leadership theories could influence middle management turnover differently. A second limitation was the potentially limited number of interview participants for the study, which could impact the generalizability of the results to other settings. Additionally, the hierarchal level of the study participants increases the likelihood of participant attrition due to

constraints of availability and workload, as well as the potential lack of relevance of the research.

A third limitation was the lack of extant literature on situational leadership theory which could impact the scope and depth of the literature review of the theoretical framework. A fourth limitation identified was the use of self-reported questionnaires that was used to gather data for the study. According to Saunders et al. (2015), questionnaires as a primary data source are predisposed to data quality issues. Respondents may therefore incorrectly interpret the questions, and this could compromise internal validity.

Delimitations

Delimitations are self-imposed boundaries established within the study (Yin, 2017). The setting for this study was the automotive industry located in the north-eastern region of Trinidad. The selection of one country within the Caribbean could limit the scope and generalizability of the study findings to other countries and regions. Additionally, my decision to conduct the study in Trinidad could prove challenging in aligning relevant existing and seminal research literature that underpins the study.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this research study may provide pertinent information that could compel business leaders to apply different strategies for managing and directing subordinates in order to achieve organizational goals and objectives. Additionally, leaders may be encouraged by the results of the study to comprehensively analyze how various leadership strategies may influence middle management turnover and organizational

performance, and subsequently, the social implications of unsuccessful strategies on the community members in which the firm operates.

Contribution to Business Practice

Using the results of the study may benefit businesses by adding to the knowledge and development literature for executives who strive to be better business leaders. Furthermore, business leaders may become aware of how leadership strategies may impact middle management turnover. Based on such knowledge, leaders can apply strategies that reshape the work environment and create a positive organizational culture, foster a healthier and more supportive organizational setting that results in improved employee organizational commitment, and improve leadership effectiveness. Moreover, turnover costs as a consequence of ineffective leadership behavior can be detrimental to firms. Company executives incur significant costs associated with turnover, such as recruitment and selection costs, training costs, and lost productivity (Sharma, 2016).

The results of this study may provide a behavioral model for leaders to mitigate such attributed costs. Furthermore, the outcome of the study may provide executive leaders with a framework that supports the company's attraction and retention strategy, which serves as a source of competitive advantage for the firm (Hom, Lee, Shaw, & Hausknecht, 2017). According to Dyer, Godfrey, Jensen, and Bryce (2016), employees fundamental to operational sustainability who defect to competitors can potentially destabilize the previous employer's competitive advantage. Therefore, leaders who fail to retain essential talent or mitigate management turnover may encumber the firm's ability to sustain market share, maintain profitability, and increase shareholder value.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for positive social change include increased opportunities for job retention and job creation as a result of sustained employment and business continuity. The long-term impact of unemployment resultant from excessive turnover or business failure can have significant adverse economic, psychological, and social impact for displaced employees. High turnover or sustained unemployment can result in prolonged loss of earnings, loss of social support, unemployment stigmatization, and disruption to family life, including a failure to procure educational opportunities and advancements for children of displaced employees (Brand, 2015). Additionally, there is a strong and logical relationship between unemployment, poverty, and crime. Increased unemployment reduces the income levels of families, which in turn increases the potential for individuals to engage in criminal activities to bridge the economic gap (Šileika & Bekerytė, 2013).

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

Researchers perform a literature review to synthesize findings relative to a research topic of interest, as well as to identify gaps within the area of study (Neill, 2017). A structured and comprehensive literature review provides insights into the research context based on an evidence-based and in-depth analysis of the research topic (Winchester & Salji, 2016). During the literature review process, I critically evaluated and summarized the current literature aligned with the conceptual framework and explored gaps in the literature to provide a comprehensive view of the phenomenon. Furthermore, I reviewed and analyzed the professional and academic literature available through theoretical and seminal books, peer-reviewed and scholarly articles, and

professional and academic journals. I endeavored to ensure that 85% of the total number of sources were peer-reviewed, and that a minimum of 60 different peer-reviewed sources compiled the literature review of this study. I kept an account of these requirements based on the number of sources and percentages attributable throughout the research process. The current data is shown in Table 1.

Moreover, the online resources available via the Walden University Library database formed the primary sources for the literature review. Multiple databases also served to expand the literature framework and included, but were not limited to, Academic Search, ABI/INFORM Global, Google Scholar, Science Direct, ProQuest Central, and Business Source Complete databases. These databases were used to search for the following keywords, phrases, and terminologies: *situational leadership theory*, *situational leadership II model*, *contingency theory*, *path-goal theory*, *employee turnover*, *involuntary and voluntary turnover*, *employee commitment*, *organizational commitment*, *employee engagement*, *middle management turnover*, *job satisfaction*, *leader behavior*, *employee retention*, and *employee intention to leave or stay*; or a combination of these keywords, phrases, and terminologies.

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore the leadership strategies that automotive leaders used to mitigate middle management turnover. Leaders often lack an awareness of the negative impact of their style on subordinate behavior. Understanding how leadership approaches influence organizational and employee outcomes may support the development and implementation of strategies aimed at mitigating middle management turnover. Through the literature review process, I gained

valuable insights into the phenomena and provided a critical analysis and synthesis of literature associated with the conceptual framework of this study. Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership theory grounded the conceptual framework of this study.

Table 1

Summary of Reference Types and Percentages

Reference by type ^a	Within 5 years ^b	Older than 5 years ^c	Total	Percentage of total references ^d
Overall doctoral study references				
Peer-reviewed journals	175	52	226	96%
Books	3	2	5	3%
Other resources	1	1	2	1%
Total	179	54	233	100%
Literature review references				
Peer-reviewed journals	56	20	76	97%
Books	0	1	1	1.5%
Other resources	1	0	1	1.5%
Total	57	21	78	100%

Note. ^aThe reference type column identifies the specific type of reference. ^bThe recent references column indicates the number of references that were published within 5 years of the expected 2020 date of the Chief Academic Officer's (CAO) approval. ^cThe older references column identifies the number of references that are older than 5 years based on the 2020 expected date of the CAO's approval. ^dThe percentage of total references represent the total number of a particular type of reference divided by the total number of references, multiplied by 100.

Situational Leadership Theory

The conceptual framework for this study was Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership theory. Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership theory is founded on the

premise that leadership approaches influence follower behavior, requiring that leaders' select the most appropriate style and behavior, dependent on situational variables (Bosse et al., 2017; Hersey & Blanchard, 1982). Accordingly, one leadership type is effective in one situation, whereas a different type of leadership is effective in another situation (Salehzadeh, Shahin, Kazemi, & Shaemi Barzoki, 2015). The central element of situational leadership theory is the leader's ability to adapt to changing work environments. Therefore, a leader's effectiveness is contingent on their capacity to modify their behavior to match the subordinate's level of maturity and capability (Silverthorne & Wang, 2001; Zigarmi & Roberts, 2017). Consequently, situational leadership theorists proposed that because situations vary, different leadership behaviors are possible and required in daily operational practice.

According to Zigarmi and Roberts (2017), the situational leadership framework has been one of the most established, widely recognized, and utilized leadership model. Although widely recognized and practiced, situational leadership theorists noted that the theory has produced mixed results and lacks empirical support. A core issue concerns the measurement of the employee's competence and commitment (Zigarmi & Roberts, 2017). Marques (2015) agreed, stating that although situational leadership is a readily accepted style among business leaders, the style can prove difficult to measure. Silverthorne and Wang (2001) confirmed that extant research had provided only weak support for the theory, not only because of the equivocal nature of the specific findings but also because relatively little or limited research exists on the situational theory of leadership. Despite these challenges, the situational leadership model is nonetheless

popular among business leaders who embrace the appropriateness of the framework to the organizational setting and successfully apply the model (Marques, 2015).

Founded on the leader-follower dyadic, the situational leadership model enhances effective leadership by catering to the needs of employees such that their job performance, and job satisfaction, increases (Vandayani, Kartini, & Azis, 2015). Accordingly, to accommodate the individual needs of followers, the situational leader must assess each follower's need accurately to identify and apply the most appropriate situational leadership strategies that will maximize results (Hall, 2015; Marques, 2015). Salehzadeh et al. (2015) agreed, noting that a specific leadership approach could have more effect on employee outcomes compared to other styles and accredits this impact to the quality of relational interaction between the leader and the follower. Alonderiene and Majauskaite (2015) supported this view, affirming that leadership style effectiveness increased when the leader applied the correct style to the situation.

Furthermore, Vandayani et al. (2015) observed that leaders who adopted the situational leadership approach interacted unreservedly with their employees and thus motivated them to work together to achieve the desired result. Vandayani et al. further offered that situational leaders can modify their personalities along with their leadership approach so that they work together with their employees for the ultimate benefit of the company. When leaders can apply the situational leadership method successfully, they can direct their employee's achievement of the strategic, operational, and tactical goals of the organization, despite any challenges or changes to how the firm operates (Hambleton & Gumpert, 1982). Papworth, Milne, and Boak (2009) affirmed, noting that due to the

dynamic nature of business operations, leaders must anticipate organizational changes that can affect the firm's performance and prepare subordinates to embrace these changes. Within this context, leaders should employ a leadership model that supports the change implementation, adequately, and motivates employees to focus on the larger purpose, that is, the achievement of the corporate goals and objectives (Dhingra & Punia, 2016). Hersey and Blanchard (1982) acknowledged that through the application of the situational leadership model, organizational change leaders are better able to implement change, effectively and successfully.

Mahdinezhad, Suandi, Bin Silong, and Omar (2013) posited that ineffective leadership might result in organizational failure while enterprises with effective leaders cultivate innovative thinking, effectively manage organizational changes and environmental changes, and sustain high levels of employee job performance. Vroom and Jago (2007) supported this view by stating that situational leaders are ordinarily aware of how their style and approach either support their effectiveness or ineffectiveness as a leader. When employees are not able to adapt to the leader's approach and maximize their ability to perform at the level expected, the results can be deficient (Kraemer, Gouthier, & Heidenreich, 2017). Business leaders greatly depend on their manager's ability to perform, responsibly, and effectively. Ineffective leadership approaches can negatively impact business outcomes, increase employee job dissatisfaction, and subsequently, enhance employee turnover (Pyc, Meltzer, & Liu, 2017).

However, Vroom and Jago (2007) cautioned that operational demands and environmental influences could impede functional prudence. As such, organizational

sustainability can be challenging to acquire and sustain. Buble, Juras, and Matić (2014) added that organizational characteristics and job characteristics motivate individuals at different levels, which in turn positively influences the individual's job performance, job satisfaction, and improves the leader-follower dyadic relationship. Alonderiene and Majauskaite (2015) added that a leader's behavior could positively impact the employee's perception of job satisfaction based on various factors such as autonomy, organizational climate, supervisory support, job security, recognition, communication, and empowerment. Alonderiene and Majauskaite noted that leadership styles premised on high levels of follower interaction, coupled with high concern for the follower, can result in a high-significantly positive effect on job satisfaction. Conclusively, the researchers stated that job satisfaction directly influences employee performance and organizational performance, subsequently. Vroom and Jago (2007) noted that subordinates would assess high performing managers as more effective than leaders that are assessed to perform poorly.

The performance of the highly rated leaders is akin to their flexibility and effectiveness as situational leaders (Lynch, 2015). Thompson and Glaso (2015) suggested that through the situational leadership approach, leaders can direct, inform, and manage their employees efficiently. Leaders can coach and provide feedback when needed, offer professional and personal support, and engage with the employee throughout the entire task. Such an approach allows a leader to build trust among their employees and more so, improves decision making (Thompson & Glaso, 2015). Ultimately, through the application of a situational leadership approach, a leader can utilize several techniques to

effectively and efficiently influence employees so that they are motivated to increase their job performance.

Situational Leadership II Model

In 1985, Blanchard developed a variant model based on the situational leadership model, namely, the situational leadership II (SLII) framework. According to Zigarmi and Roberts (2017), the SLII model defined the four leadership approaches based on different amounts of supportive behavior or consideration, and directive behavior or initiating structure. Hall (2015) suggested that the SLII model allowed leaders to change their leadership approach to best suit the maturity and readiness level of the subordinate and according to details of the task. Business leaders can balance their leadership style approach between the four leadership approaches toward different types of followers, namely, directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating (Marques, 2015; Zigarmi & Roberts, 2017). Blanchard postulated that each of the four approaches impacts the leader's diagnostic ability, flexibility, and effectiveness across different situations. Blanchard further pronounced that the four leadership styles, identified hereunder, represent different amounts of supportive behavior or consideration, and directive behavior or initiating structure (Zigarmi & Roberts, 2017).

Directing. Indicated by a high directive, low supportive style, this approach is applied toward the least mature followers. The approach utilizes only directive behavior or initiating structure with no supporting behaviors or consideration as motivation for the follower to complete the assigned task (Northouse, 2013).

Coaching. Characterized by a high directive, high supportive style, coaching utilizes both high directive and high supportive behaviors to motivate followers and is geared towards followers with moderately low maturity levels. Situational leaders coach their subordinates by providing them with detailed instructions on the subject matter or task and encouraging them to adopt a collaborative approach to decision-making which improves the engagement levels of employees (Lynch, 2015).

Participating. Represented by a combination of a high supportive and low directive style, this approach creates shared decision-making by adopting a more democratic system. Participating is concentrated on supportive behaviors and is more efficient with followers of moderately high maturity levels (Northouse, 2013).

Delegating. Indicated by a low supportive, low directive style, the leaders utilize the delegating approach when followers have attained maturity and are competent and confident in their ability to perform the tasks. The leader, although still in charge, delegates more responsibilities to this follower classification (Northouse, 2013).

According to Zigarmi and Roberts (2017), the SLII model is premised on the basis that no single-best leadership style exists, but instead any one of the four leadership approaches, depending on the situation, could have merit and could be successfully applied. Bos-Nehles et al. (2017) agreed with this assertion noting that with no one best style of leadership, supervisors adapt their behavior to meet the demands of each unique situation. Silverthorne and Wang (2001) noted that because different situations may require different styles, the leader needs to decide on an appropriate style by evaluating his or her subordinates and their degrees of readiness or maturity. Moreover, Silverthorne

and Wang (2001) indicated that the most effective leaders are those capable of using different leadership styles in response to the fluctuating maturity levels and readiness levels of their subordinates. Therefore, flexibility in leadership style is a necessity if a high level of leadership effectiveness is desired (Silverthorne & Wang, 2001).

Employee readiness refers to the psychological and task competencies of those involved in a task (Silverthorne & Wang, 2001). However, Marques (2015) argued that a follower's readiness requires elevation regarding his or her knowledge of the task, skill in performing the task, and ability to meet deadlines. Such reliance on the task at hand rather than on applying a more comprehensive viewpoint that can support the attainment of the primary strategic goals and objectives of the firm can have a detrimental impact on the business (Salehzadeh et al., 2015). An employee can receive all the training that is required and be motivated and be inspired in their job; however, he or she may not be able to work efficiently to fulfill their duties as assigned to them because of the myopic approach to being task-oriented (Salehzadeh et al., 2015). Furthermore, due to the focus on applying the four approaches at varying degrees and combinations, a leader's longer-term overarching focus can be redirected, and consequently, redound to leadership ineffectiveness and failure (Salehzadeh et al., 2015).

Although Blanchard developed the SLII model to expound on the initial theoretical framework, many researchers have identified ambiguities in the utilization of both the original model and the varied framework. (Blanchard & Hersey, 1970; Blanchard et al., 1993) conceded that the inconsistencies associated with the theory manifest because of frequent relabelling of the model and the ease in which researchers

have interchangeably applied the original theoretical framework proffered by Hersey and Blanchard in 1969 and the later model developed by Blanchard in 1985. Blanchard et al. (1993) concurred, indicating that the ambiguity was propagated because theorists frequently presented the original situational leadership model and the SLII model, as the same.

Blanchard et al. (1993) made the distinction between the SLT model and the SLII model stating that the newer SLII model promotes high task or directive behavior and low relationships or supportive behavior to address situations. Conversely, the original situational leadership model advocates high task or directive behavior, and high relationships or supportive behavior as the most appropriate solution to any situation. Silverthorne and Wang (2001) identified that where an employee's level of development is low, the leader can opt for a style that is more task-oriented. Subsequently, when the employee develops to the level required, the leader then changes their style to one that is more supportive. In such a case, the leader gives more instructions that are specific to the goals and how they can achieve said goals. Ultimately, situational leadership theory differs from other leadership theories because the levels of leader behaviors are varied (Hall, 2015).

Benefits that can be when the leader matches their leadership style with the requirements of the situation, as well as the maturity and readiness level of the employee, includes greater job performance and job satisfaction, affect towards the job, trust in leadership, and increased intent to stay. Such benefits will likely be significantly lower for employees who do not receive the leadership style they perceive is needed (Zigarmi &

Roberts, 2017). Marques (2015) added that when the situational leadership style matches employee readiness, employees' organizational citizen behavior also increases.

Contingency Theory

A similar theoretical framework aligned to Hersey and Blanchard's situational theory is Fred Fiedler's contingency theory. Fiedler (1972) postulated that leaders perform differently based on varying conditions, and the degree of power and influence garnered by the leader within a given situation. Miller, Butler, and Cosentino (2004) agreed and noted that Fiedler's contingency theory analyzes how different situational factors predict leadership effectiveness and allow leaders the ability to exert power or control over their subordinates. Contingency theorists suggest that a leader's influence is premised on the degree of acceptance and support the leader obtains from subordinates, and the extent to which the task is structured. According to Pires da Cruz, Nunes, and Pinheiro (2011), a leader's approach depends on the leader's innate propensity to be either task-focused or relationship-focused. In this regard, Fiedler developed the least preferred co-worker (LPC) scale which assists business leaders in identifying suitable candidates for leadership positions across the business, as well as which leadership position is best suited based on the propensity for task or relationship leadership orientation. Therefore, the success of the leader results in the leader's ability to determine whether subordinates are motivated by providing more challenging and meaningful work assignments. Conversely, relationship motivated employees would require a leadership style that is premised on creating and sustaining effective leader-member relations (Miller et al., 2004).

Shao, Feng, and Hu (2016) argued that the fundamental tenet of contingency theory is that no optimal or best leadership approach exists. Shao et al. (2016) extended this view, noting that the most effective leadership approach was contingent on organizational and environmental factors which moderated organizational performance. Consequently, to become competitive, business leaders must consider how such factors influence the performance and motivation of their employees. According to Miller et al. (2004), the contingency model determines the effectiveness of leaders based on their motivational disposition of either being task-oriented or relationship-oriented. Task-oriented leaders perform in situations that require limited prior experience and poor leader-member context. Task-oriented leaders focus on goal achievement and well-structured tasks. Conversely, relationship-oriented leaders aim at creating long-lasting relationships and perform better in situations where their influence is moderate and thrive on good leader-member relations (Pires da Cruz et al., 2011; Waters, 2013).

Despite the benefits associated with the contingency theory, and more important, the related similarity with Hersey and Blanchard's situational theoretical framework, many researchers criticized Fielder's contingency theory. Northouse (2013) suggested that Fielder's contingency theory fails to satisfactorily clarify why certain leadership styles are more efficient in one situation than another. Waters (2013) argued that the expectation to apply the level of flexible leadership required across different situations should be the primary objective of organizational leaders and not the leaders themselves. Furthermore, Pires da Cruz et al. (2011) noted that one of the major criticisms of Fiedler's contingency model is that because Fiedler believed that leadership style is

innate and not learned, leaders cannot be taught to adapt their styles to the situation. Instead, the most effective approach to ensuring leadership effectiveness is to change the leader to align with the situation. Additionally, Waters (2013) noted that contingency theorists fail to explain why specific leadership styles are more effective than others, depending on whether the situation requires a task or relationship orientation. Ultimately, Fiedler distinguishes between task-oriented and relationship-oriented leadership styles based on different situational factors to determine the contingencies that increase the leader's effectiveness.

Path-Goal Theory

Another comparable theoretical phenomenon that closely aligns with Hersey and Blanchard's situational theory is Robert J. House's path-goal theory. House (1971) posited that to increase employees' motivation, empowerment, and job satisfaction, a specific leadership style or behavior that best fits the employee and work environment, is required to achieve organizational goals. Northouse (2013) concurred, noting that the process involved the leader selecting a specific style or behavior that guided employees through a direct path in the fulfillment of their daily goals and objectives. Farhan (2017) added that adopting a path-goal approach allow leaders to reduce role ambiguity, remove impediments to achieving the goal, and encourage and reward their employees for achieving the organizational objectives. The path-goal theory developed by House incorporates different aspects of leader behavior and follower characteristics aimed at understanding, predicting, analyzing and influencing follower attitude and behavior based on identifying and matching the appropriate leader behavior to the situation (Phillips &

Phillips, 2016). House (1971) identified four approaches that leaders could adapt to influence subordinate behavior and goal achievement, as well as quickly respond to subordinates' needs, expectations, and wants. House and Mitchell (1975) further defined these four types of leader behaviors or styles, as directive, supportive, participative, and achievement-oriented.

According to Gartzia and Baniandrés (2016), the four approaches are grounded on two factors which are similar to the framework of the SLII model, that is, consideration and initiating structure. Gartzia and Baniandrés explained that consideration structure associated with the participative, supportive, and achievement-oriented leadership approaches describes the extent to which a leader is concerned with developing mutual trust and respect and promoting positive interpersonal relationships with their subordinates. The researchers aligned initiating structure to the directive leadership approach. Initiating structure, they noted represents the degree to which a leaders' approach is oriented either to task or goal achievement.

Through the participative approach, leaders allow subordinates to share responsibilities and influence the decision-making process, which could encourage innovation and creativity across the organization and subsequently enhance their job satisfaction and job performance (Farhan, 2017). House (1996) noted that effective participative leader behavior is premised on the leader providing clarity between work-related effort and extrinsic reward, and on increasing the congruence between subordinate goals and organizational goals. Within the context of participative leadership, subordinates can influence their job-related outcomes. Such autonomy enhances their

ability to improve their effort and, consequently, their job performance. As a result, Farhan (2017) suggested that the participative style is the most valuable of the path-goal leadership approaches since the approach facilitates the leader's transference of knowledge, ideas, suggestions, and opinions, across the organization. A participative style is most effective when subordinates are highly knowledgeable, skilled, and involved in their work (Phillips & Phillips, 2016).

Directive leadership approach applies when subordinates are not clear on how to achieve their assigned task. Through direction and instructions, leaders can motivate subordinates by providing structure and clear standards in the achievement of the goal (Farhan, 2017; House, 1996). A leader who adopts a directive leadership style provides specific guidance on what is expected, schedules and coordinates work, and provides clarifying policies, procedures, and rules, which consequently reduces role ambiguity. Such leaders ensure extrinsic rewards through pay, career advancements, development, and job security. According to Farhan (2017) directive leadership style is most effective when subordinates are uncertain about the specific task or when uncertainty pervades the environment. Belas (2013) concluded, however, that directive leadership style, although preferred by some leaders, can result in lower job performance and job satisfaction mainly where subordinates are less opened to being micro-managed or directed. Ultimately, directive leadership behavior provides a psychological structure for subordinates which support the achievement of organizational goals and objectives.

House (1971) defined a supportive leadership approach as an emotional undertaking whereby leaders who adopted this style, encourage others and build trust

through the formation of strong emotional bonds with their employees, which in turn has a positive impact on employee job satisfaction. Supportive leadership behavior is focused on satisfying employees' needs and preferences and can be a source of self-confidence and social gratification. Also, supportive leaders have been found to effectively reduce physical and emotional stress and frustrations, which may occur during goal achievement (Farhan, 2017; Gartzia & Baniandrés, 2016; House, 1996). According to Farhan (2017), supportive leadership is more effective in situations where tasks and relationships are physically or psychologically challenging. Sökmen, Bitmis, and Üner (2015) also positively associated supportive leadership approach with the person-organization fit. Person-organization fit occurs when the individuals' needs, desires, and preferences are met by the organizational structures and systems that are in place. Farhan (2017) and House (1996), however, noted that in situations where tasks and relationships are challenging, employees may be unable to rely on experience or knowledge to accomplish the task. Consequently, job knowledge and experience become negatively related to job performance (Farhan, 2017; House, 1996). Furthermore, Sökmen et al., (2015) noted that a supportive leadership approach increases the leader-follower relationship, which can positively impact job satisfaction, commitment to the business, and turnover intentions. However, Sharma (2016) who researched the causes of turnover among middle-level managers in the automotive industry in Pune, found that poor leader-follower relationship and high job-related stress were the main reasons middle managers left these companies.

Achievement-oriented leaders encourage excellence in job performance through challenging performance objectives, continuous improvement, and displaying confidence

in subordinate's ability to achieve and sustain high-performance standards (House, 1971; Monzani, Ripoll, & Peiró, 2015). Achievement-oriented leader behavior can cause subordinates to excel and build confidence in their ability to meet challenging goals and objectives (House, 1996). House (1971) suggested that achievement-oriented leaders emphasize personal achievement; therefore, the success of achievement-oriented leader behavior is dependent on the achievement motivation of the subordinate. Farhan (2017) supported this view, noting that employees who are highly motivated by personal achievement strive in challenging situations, are risks tolerant, anticipate obstacles, and develop strategies aimed at overcoming such barriers. Notwithstanding, researchers Glaser, Stam, and Takeuchi (2016) who developed and tested a multilevel model to explain how the relationship between a middle manager's job performance and personal initiative depends on the extent of alignment between the manager's risk propensities found that risk propensity reduced job performance based on personal initiative, but only when middle managers received high job autonomy. Ultimately, Farhan (2017) noted that achievement-oriented leaders should set challenging goals for highly motivated employees and display confidence in their ability to meet these goals.

House (1971) noted that the path-goal theory provided leaders with the ability to adopt appropriate behavior dependent on the change in situational factors such as task uncertainty and organizational culture. Subordinates interpret leaders' behavior based on the degree of structure required, perceived level of competence, and their desire for control. Therefore, leaders must understand their employee's motivation to achieve optimal results. Conclusively, the path-goal leadership theorist considers both employee

characteristics and task and environment characteristics in the pursuit of goal accomplishment (House, 1996). However, leaders must select the most appropriate leadership approach, that is, directing, supporting, participative, or achievement-oriented to remove obstacles, create a clear path to accomplishing the goal, and ultimately, increase the employee's motivation to accomplishing the task (House, 1971, 1996). To be effective, leaders who adopt a path-goal leadership approach should define the goal, clarify the path to accomplishment, remove any barriers to achieving the task, and provide the necessary support needed to achieve the goal. Within the context of path-goal leadership approach, leaders can improve subordinates' job performance, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (House, 1996; Phillips & Phillips, 2016).

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is the degree to which the employees or workers of an organization identify themselves with the organization (Ćulibrk et al., 2018). George (2015) described organizational commitment as the antecedent of predicting the intent of employees to stay in an organization or enterprise, and their willingness to give their best in achieving the organizational goals and objectives. Dinc (2017) confirmed stating that organizational commitment is the desire of an employee to be loyal to and commit to an organization. Commitment is usually a psychological state which leads to implications for the decision of whether to discontinue or continue organization membership and also characterizes the relationships of employees with an enterprise (Mathieu, Fabi, Lacoursière, & Raymond, 2016). According to Puangyoykeaw and Nishide (2015), by determining the levels of organizational commitment, business leaders can implement

strategies aimed at enhancing productivity, achieving organizational goals and objectives, and reducing turnover and absenteeism in any business.

Three components of organizational commitment exist, namely, normative commitment, affective commitment, and continuance commitment. According to Puangyoykeaw and Nishide (2015), affective commitment identifies an employee's emotional attachment, identification, and involvement in the organization. Mercurio (2015) concurred, adding that affective commitment signifies the value of determining how employees' attitudes toward their company impact their contributions and commitment to the business by working longer hours, supporting team goals, and sharing information openly and readily. Malik, Javed, and Hassan (2017) defined normative commitment as an employee's feeling of obligation to continue being part of an organization. Puangyoykeaw and Nishide (2015) identified continuance commitment as a person's decision to stay with an organization after weighing the cost associated with leaving the company. Wagner and de Hilal (2014) suggested that with continuance commitment, the employees usually consider those benefits that are associated with his or her costs for leaving an enterprise versus those of his or her permanence. According to Keskes (2014), normative commitment is more of an obligation to maintain employment, affective commitment results from more of an individual desire, and continuance commitment supports a personal need.

Further, Mercurio (2015) stated that affective commitment is about the emotional attachment that a worker has in the organization together with their involvement and identification. Mathieu et al. (2016) noted that affective commitment usually predicted

the employee's intention to quit, and in the long run, determine actual turnover. Among the three types of organizational commitment, Wagner and de Hilal (2014) identified that the most preferred and yet challenging to promote is affective commitment. Mercurio (2015) agreed that leaders could utilize affective commitment to more predict significant organizational outcomes such as employee turnover, absenteeism, and organizational citizenship behaviors. Organizational leaders must understand that organizational commitment is a crucial contributor to organizational effectiveness.

Keskes (2014) noted that organizational commitment stimulates the employee's utmost desires to meet organization objectives and goals, improves the employees' performance and boosts their desire to continue serving the organization. Work motivation, satisfaction, various work-related behaviors, and attitudes are highly related to organizational commitment. Malik et al. (2017) agreed, stating that organizational commitment can result in reduced absenteeism, limited knowledge-sharing opportunities, reduced turnover, and diminished organizational citizenship behaviors. Multiple factors determine employees' organizational commitment which includes leadership style and job satisfaction (Ćulibrk et al., 2018). Ćulibrk et al. concluded that job satisfaction and organizational commitment mediated employee turnover. Suifan, Diab, and Abdallah (2017) added that increased employee involvement within an organization often translates to increased employee commitment.

An employee's emotional connection or the sense of belonging creates both an ethical and moral obligation on the individual to continue working for the organization. However, the levels of involvement in the job highly determine the types of feelings that

an employee will have. The involvement only affects the feelings about their tasks and does not extend to the external aspects of the job (Zopiatis, Constanti, & Theocharous, 2014). These connections are supposed to be enhanced by organizational commitment. Suifan et al. (2017) suggested that workers who develop good leader-member relationships are obligated to perform and reciprocate their commitment through hard work and a desire to stay with the firm. Jørgensen and Becker (2015) indicated that the continued development of employees' organizational skills and knowledge establish long-term organizational commitment. Management, therefore, has direct control over employees' organizational commitment. Consequently, a lack of enhanced organizational commitment is disastrous for organizational performance.

Zopiatis et al. (2014) noted that overtime declined organizational performance can render organizations uncompetitive and can result in a failure by the leaders to accomplish the strategic goals, as well as a failure to achieve profitability. Jørgensen and Becker (2015) highlighted the potentially detrimental consequences of organizational professionals who lack the level of organizational commitment that is required to sustain business growth and sustainability. Such a lack of commitment to the firm and customers can result in increased workplace tension. However, according to Jørgensen and Becker, incongruence between professional commitment and the organization is of little relevance in enhancing customer outcomes or positive organizational outcomes when the contractual status is kept independent.

High commitment management practices by an enterprise result in high organization and individual success. There are some management practices that increase

employees' commitment to their company and clients or customers (Jørgensen & Becker, 2015). However, such commitment can be short-term, as organizational leaders are required to devote significant effort to maintain the employee's commitment to the business and subsequently, accomplish the goals of the firm (Dinc, 2017). The level of employee organizational commitment reflects the leadership quality of an organization. As a result, the executives of an organization can effectively determine the relationship that exists between employee commitment and leadership. Malik et al. (2017) proffered that employee organizational commitment should be enhanced and promoted at all costs to ensure organizational success. Dinc (2017) supported this view by stating that organizational leaders must encourage employee organizational commitment if they are to retain a skilled workforce within an organization.

Employee Turnover

According to Mathieu et al. (2016), employee turnover can decrease customer satisfaction, result in job knowledge loss, and may negatively impact organizational performance and sustainability. Li et al. (2016) confirmed that turnover could result in lower profitability, diminish the likelihood of business continuity, undermine customer service levels, loss of rare, inimitable, and valuable human resources capabilities, and job knowledge. Nair, Salleh, and Nair (2014) extended the discussion noting that organizational leaders that fail to reduce the rate of employee turnover and the impact on the business could erode the firm's competitiveness in the long-term.

Turnover of critically skilled or talented employees is costly to the organization in terms of high employee replacement costs and disruption to business operations and

jeopardize organizational effectiveness, such as decreased customer service and low employee morale (Cho, Johanson, & Guchait, 2009; Rahman & Nas, 2013; Waldman, Carter, & Hom, 2015). Nair et al. (2014) noted that when key talent exits a company, the phenomena known as brain drain occurs which can jeopardize the achievement of strategic and operational objectives. Parker and Gerbasi (2016) agreed that when high performing employees with tacit knowledge leave a company, the firm needs to develop and implement more refined strategies to retain such employees. When skilled workers leave, the financial and time investments made in these employees are lost, forever (Puangyoykeaw & Nishide, 2015). George (2015) agreed and cautioned that there is a danger with the loss of institutional memory and knowledge attributed to high levels of turnover amongst professional employees.

However, not all turnover negatively impacts firm performance. Wagner and de Hilal (2014) proffered that the costs attributed to unavoidable turnover can outweigh the benefits derived from the implemented change initiative. Hom et al. (2017) also identified functional turnover as benefiting the organization. Functional turnover occurs where the loss of surplus, low quality, or costly workforce serve to enhance operational effectiveness. Parker and Gerbasi (2016) supported this view citing that turnover is not necessarily detrimental to companies as the exit of underperforming employees can result in cost savings and increased performance. Turnover is the likelihood of an employee's plan to either voluntarily or involuntarily leave a company (Li et al., 2016).

Voluntary turnover. Voluntary turnover occurs when an employee exits a company based on his or her own decision, thereby exhibiting a high preference for

leaving and having high control over the choice (Li et al., 2016; Sharma, 2016). Business executives should have an interest in understanding voluntary turnover. A more in-depth analysis of voluntary turnover allows companies to proactively implement strategies to minimize operational disruptions and more important, to achieve the goals and objectives of the organization, despite the employee's departure (Parker & Gerbasi, 2016). Kraemer et al. (2017), examined the impact of voluntary turnover on business performance and concluded that voluntary turnover crucially diminishes an organization's performance, especially in organizations that rely on high-skilled employees.

Involuntary turnover. Involuntary turnover occurs when an organization unilaterally decides to terminate the employment contract of the employee (s). Such decisions can develop as a result of the firm's diversification strategies to either downsize, outsource, or merge operations to gain or regain a competitive advantage (Parker & Gerbasi, 2016). Other reasons for involuntary turnover are retrenchment, dismissal, or discharge (Li et al., 2016). In some cases, Li et al. noted that employees reluctantly exit organizations despite their satisfaction with their job and their contribution to the business. These organizational reasons impact the employee's perceived control over leaving the company. Leaders can proactively identify these reluctant leavers and implement strategies to mitigate the employee's decision to leave, mainly when the employee is considered to be a top performer or critical talent (Li et al., 2016; Sharma, 2016).

Many causes of turnover exist for organizations which may encourage employees to leave an organization, among these causes are job dissatisfaction, a lack of

commitment, and ineffective or abusive leadership behaviors (Hom et al., 2017; Li et al., 2016). Abusive leadership style has been determined to be a major driver of employee turnover (Haar, de Fluiter, & Brougham, 2016; Waldman et al., 2015). Pradhan and Jena (2017) defined abusive leadership as the subordinates' perceptions of the leaders' propensity to engage in the prolonged exhibition of hostile and dysfunctional behavior towards subordinates. Abusive leadership behavior can result in adverse effects such as decreased employee job satisfaction, diminished organizational commitment, reduced employee engagement, and higher turnover (Haar et al., 2016; Pradhan & Jena, 2017; Waldman et al., 2015). Likewise, Ou et al., (2017) who examined how top executives encourage job satisfaction and intent to stay at the middle management level found that leaders who displayed humility in their interactions with middle managers increased subordinate job satisfaction by fulfilling the subordinate's innate needs for autonomy and relatedness. Furthermore, based on the alignment between the employee's perception of the leader as an agent of the firm, Haar et al., (2016) and Pradhan and Jena (2017) identified the positive association between abusive leader behavior and employee turnover intentions. Cote (2017) also cautioned that destructive leadership behavior undermines the leader's ability to achieve the overarching goals and resources of the firm, and impacts the well-being and job satisfaction of the employee.

Employee Turnover Intentions

Ali Mahdi, Abbas, Mazar, and George (2015) suggested that determining the causes that propel employees to leave or to stay with a firm should be a significant question for business leaders. Although different, turnover intention is a strong predictor

of actual turnover (Mathieu et al., 2016; Rahman & Nas, 2013). Turnover intention can be described as a deliberate and conscious decision of an individual to voluntarily and permanently withdraw from the business or the extent to which employees plan on continuing their employment relationship with the organization (Brewer et al., 2016). Puangyoykeaw and Nishide (2015) added that turnover intention is not the actual separation from the organization itself but rather the individual's perceived likelihood of either exiting or remaining with the business. An employee's intention to leave represents the final phase of the withdrawal cognition process stemming from initially having thoughts of resigning, next, having a desire to search for another job, and lastly, the intention to quit (Cho et al., 2009).

Turnover intention serves as a valid and current predictor of actual turnover and provides employers with a basis for immediate remedial strategies (Mathieu et al., 2016; Suifan et al., 2017). Business leaders can benefit from understanding how an employee's turnover intention can impact firm continuity through the loss of key talent and depletion of the firm's competitive advantage (Puangyoykeaw & Nishide, 2015; Sharma, 2016). When talented employees opt to exit businesses, they exit with the extensive experience and tacit knowledge they would have acquired over their tenure when their exits occur without prior notification, this can lead to high levels of organizational dysfunction (Cho et al., 2009). Four determinants indirectly influence an employee's turnover intentions, namely, leadership, organization, work, and individual characteristics. Leadership characteristics include management support, availability, communication, and respect (George, 2015). Organizational characteristics encompass leadership style, working

conditions, advancement opportunities, and workload (Ahmad, 2018; George, 2015; Redelinghuys, Rothmann, & Botha, 2019).

Work characteristics include co-worker support, autonomy, compensation, availability of resources, and work-life balance (Cowden & Cummings, 2015; George, 2015). Individual characteristics account for age, gender, stress levels, and self-fulfillment (Cowden & Cummings, 2015; George, 2015). Brewer et al. (2016) concurred that promotional opportunities and job satisfaction had a more significant impact on intent to stay than any other variable, and any improvement would positively impact an employee's intent to stay with a company. McGilton, Boscart, Brown, and Bowers (2014) also asserted that the opportunity for growth and promotion increased job satisfaction.

Job satisfaction, leadership practices, organizational commitment, and the work environment, influence intention to stay. Ineffective leader-member relations or lack of supportive leadership motivate an employee's intention to leave (McGilton et al., 2014). Intent to stay is also directly influenced by both affective responses and cognitive responses to factors in the workplace. According to Cowden and Cummings (2015), cognitive responses include perceptions of empowerment, and external career opportunities. Affective responses to the work environment are job satisfaction, a desire to stay, job fulfillment, and job stress. Employee satisfaction with their supervisor was found to be a leading predictor of turnover intentions and, consequently, a significant relationship existed between leader style applicability and employee turnover intention (Cho et al., 2009). Salehzadeh (2017) in a case study focused on determining the most appropriate leadership style, supported this view noting that the follower expectations

concerning a leader's behavior in different situations can either improve or diminish the relationship between the leader and the follower, and consequently impact an employee's intention to stay or leave a company.

According to Kebede and Demeke (2017), business leaders establish the culture of the organization and set the framework for employees to strive to achieve the goals and objectives of the business. Leaders motivate and inspire subordinates to improve both job performance and job satisfaction by organizing team efforts, manipulating the situation, and by asserting their authority. Consequently, leadership approaches and employee job satisfaction are fundamental to organizational effectiveness and can influence employees' organizational commitment, motivation, and turnover intentions (Buble et al., 2014). According to Buble et al. employee motivation is inherently grounded in leadership, and leadership approaches. Leadership represents a process whereby followers understand and support the collective efforts of the team to achieve shared objectives. Moreover, effective leadership advances organizational outcomes and enhances the ability of business leaders to attract and retain talent, which is crucial for maintaining competitive advantage (Opoku, Ahmed, & Cruickshank, 2015).

Leadership style has a direct impact on job satisfaction, and therefore, directly affects employee turnover intentions (Alonderiene & Majauskaite, 2015). Leadership style is significant in enhancing the level of employee commitment in the organization (Nagendra & Farooqui, 2016). A leader's style refers to a combination of behaviors, traits, characteristics, behaviors, and skills exhibited between a leader and their subordinate. Effective leadership style depicts the ability of an individual to motivate

others to work together for a common outcome. According to Kebede and Demeke (2017) and Nagendra and Farooqui (2016), how the leader exhibits these behaviors and skills determine the type of leadership style the leader adopts.

High turnover at a management level could significantly impact a company's ability to either sustain profitability or maintain a competitive advantage. Accordingly, a leader's understanding of the impact leadership style has on middle management's organizational commitment, and the manager's intent to stay with the company can support the organization's strategic business growth and continuity. Such awareness and understanding can derive strategies which can be applied to mitigate middle management turnover and increase the manager's intent to stay.

Employee and Management Retention

A growing awareness of changes in the workforce characteristics requires that organizational leaders focus on retaining skilled employees, keeping them fully engaged, and implementing strategies that increase their commitment to the company. Ineffective retention strategies can negatively impact corporate culture, result in missed productivity targets, loss in revenue growth, and increased operational expenditure (Cloutier, Felusiak, Hill, & Pemberton-Jones, 2015). Employee retention is a process in which organization human resource professionals implement strategies that create an environment which encourages employees to stay with the firm for longer periods. Bibi, Pangil, Johari, and Ahmad (2017), concluded that employee retention is a vital source for achieving competitive advantage. Takawira et al. (2014) concurred, noting that retaining key talent increasingly becomes a critical source of competitive advantage.

Within an increasingly global competitive landscape, where knowledge is a commodity, skilled knowledge workers, particularly in management positions, provide the competitive advantage that leaders depend on for future success (Khoele and Daya, 2014). Consequently, high turnover at management levels can adversely affect company sustainability. A crucial requirement for organizational leaders wanting to minimize turnover related consequences is the development and implementation of robust employee retention strategies. These strategies, Cloutier et al. (2015) noted, should be embedded within the firm's vision and mission statements, value proposition, and human resource policy framework. A fundamental element of any retention strategies is the focus on procuring key talent who possess skills that are valuable, rare, and inimitable to the firm's sustainability. Additionally, implementing initiatives, systems, and processes that improve job satisfaction and reduce turnover intentions of professionals also form part of a robust retention regime (Bibi et al., 2017; Puangyoykeaw & Nishide, 2015).

One such strategy is the facilitation of systems that support employee work-life balance. According to Deery and Jago (2015), work-life balance is a leading driver of employee retention. Abdirahman, Najeemdeen, Abidemi, and Ahmad (2018), and Kim and Ryu (2017) supported this view noting that organizational leaders who focus on ensuring work-life balance for their employees, improve the individual's organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Within the Malaysian automotive industry, Hassan et al. (2017) found that work-life balance and organizational support positively influenced employee loyalty and consequently, their intention to stay.

Several organizational and individual antecedents impact the effectiveness of work-life balance implementation. Organizational attributes include unmanageable workloads, education, and job misfit, and a lack of career development. Individual attributes include significant job stress as a result of role ambiguity and resource inadequacy, job burnout, and emotional exhaustion (Deery & Jago, 2015). Business leaders can deploy strategies which combat work-life conflict and thus improve employee retention. Such strategies include robust reward and recognition programs, structured career development programs, and a comprehensive talent management framework (Abdirahman et al., 2018; Bibi et al., 2017; Deery & Jago, 2015).

Effective diversity management also supports the successful implementation of employee retention strategies (Cloutier et al., 2015). Diversity management has significant positive work-related benefits for employees, as well as organizational leaders (Korzilius, Bücken, & Beerlage, 2017). Work-related benefits include enhanced employee creativity and the generation of more innovative ideas, improved decision-making, and increased collaboration and critical thinking (Korzilius et al., 2017). In addition to strengthening the organization's retention strategy, effective diversity management can improve the firm's brand image, provide a source of competitive advantage, and improve organizational efficiency and profitability (Fitzsimmons, Liao, & Thomas, 2017; Korzilius et al., 2017). Despite these positive outcomes, Cloutier et al. (2015) warned that business leaders who deploy diversity management as a retention strategy should focus on person-organization fit and not on the requirement to achieve a diversity-related performance indicator. Person-organizational fit influences a variety of employee

outcomes, including employee retention and employee turnover (Cloutier et al., 2015; Sökmen et al., 2015).

Formalized training and development strategies also improve employee retention. At the management level, providing rotational training opportunities that develop the leadership and management capabilities of professionals, allows managers to acquire a macro-based view of the company's operations; thereby ensuring a better understanding of how their role supports the firm's success (George, 2015). Through practical training and development programs, managers can develop the knowledge and skills needed to make greater strategic inputs, effectively lead their teams to achieve the strategic and operational objectives of the business. Building the leadership capabilities of managers support the creation of a positive corporate culture which can improve organizational commitment and employee retention, at all levels (George, 2015; Rahman & Nas, 2013).

Leadership support also impacts employee retention. Through the adoption of an appropriate leadership styles and management support, business leaders play a significant role in facilitating an environment of supportive leadership and professional development, which in turn improves employee retention (George, 2015; Keskes, 2014). Particularly, researchers Kundu and Lata (2017) noted that a supportive work environment cultivates and supports the retention of professional and managerial employees and results in a higher level of organizational commitment. George (2015) noted that professional workers perform best in an environment where their knowledge, skills, and abilities are desired within the company, particularly when necessitating critical decision-making.

Recruitment and promotion practices also positively impact management retention (Mandhanya, 2015). Human resource professionals reinforce management retention through the onboarding process and succession planning agenda. Devi and Krishna (2016) noted that human resource practices that were most effective in reducing employee turnover were associated with recruitment and selection, induction, performance management, and succession planning (Devi & Krishna, 2016). Conversely, an ineffective human resource management framework could negatively influence employee retention. In a study conducted by Presbitero, Roxas, and Chadee (2016) within a similar context of a predominantly collectivist society like Malaysia, the researchers found that robust human resource management practices such as superior remuneration and training and development strategies only had limited impact on employee retention. Presbitero et al. offered that improving the employee-organization fit proved a valuable strategy for retaining key talent.

Organizational leaders and human resource professionals should ensure that their associated human resource practices and strategies, support the retention of employees, particularly, key talent or skilled employees (Devi & Krishna, 2016). Such strategies and practices could serve to mitigate employee turnover at all levels. Ultimately, retaining valuable employees is a crucial phenomenon for business leaders. Replacement of talented professionals is expensive and critical to the firm's bottom line and sustainability. Subsequently, developing and implement retention strategies focused on retaining key skilled and talented employees should be part of the firm's overall strategic goals and objectives.

Employee Engagement

Organizational performance and sustainability are essential outcomes for business leaders. According to Abdirahman et al. (2018) and Vinerea (2015), employee job performance and loyalty, coupled with their dedication and engagement, are fundamental for achieving the company's strategic goals and objectives and support improved business performance. Park, Kim, Yoon, and Joo (2017) concluded that employee engagement represents the main contributor to organizational performance and assists business leaders in maintaining the firm's sustainability in an economic downturn. Lu, Lu, Gursoy, and Neale (2016) agreed, noting that employee engagement drives organizational profitability and success. Lu et al. (2016) added that engaged employees are more productive, respectful, and collaborative in the accomplishment of their departmental goals.

Rice, Fieger, Rice, Martin, and Knox (2017) concurred, noting that engaged employees are differentiated by their level of discretionary effort, insistence on overcoming organizational challenges, and enthusiasm to facilitate the achievement of others toward a common goal. Babakus, Yavas, and Karatepe (2017) postulated that employee engagement is a crucial precursor of job satisfaction, job performance and turnover intentions, and represent the willingness and readiness of employees to contribute to the business positively. Rice et al. (2017) determined that the value of employee engagement included enhanced organizational citizenship behaviors and decreased turnover intentions. Employee loyalty can contribute to enhanced operational efficiencies, business growth, and reduced employee turnover (Vinerea, 2015).

Within the context of professional and knowledge-based employees, motivation and engagement are derived from meaningful and challenging work which provide opportunities for independent thought, job recognition, professional development and career growth (Stumpf, Tymon, Ehr, & van Dam, 2016). Stumpf et al. (2016) added that these outcomes differ for general employees who do not have the responsibility of overseeing people, processes, or systems. Lu et al. (2016) argued that employees provided with a challenging, business critical, and self-governing roles, exhibit higher levels of employee engagement. Employee job levels significantly regulate the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intentions. The fundamental difference between the levels of engagement of professionals and general employees is the importance placed by these employees on the rewards mechanisms deployed by their employers (Rice et al., 2017). While extrinsic rewards such as compensation, job security, and working conditions have more significance for general employees, professionals place greater importance on intrinsic rewards such as meaningful work and job progress. Such intrinsic rewards have been found to create affirmative work environments and promote retention of professionals. Rice et al. (2017) however found that the employees who demonstrate higher levels of engagement are not necessarily motivated by extrinsic rewards only. Leadership approaches also play a role in employee engagement. Business leaders can significantly enhance employee motivation, engagement, job satisfaction, organizational performance, and intent to stay. Leader behaviors can cultivate a sense of intrinsic reward through engagement (Vinerea, 2015). To retain key personnel, organizational leaders must understand the motivational factors

that drive employees' reward considerations, and consequently ensure that these employees feel empowered. Talented employees must feel that their contributions are valued and fundamental to the strategic decision-making process of the firm (Rice et al., 2017; Vinerea, 2015). Mendes and Stander (2011) noted that a positive leader behavior could cultivate extraordinary individual and organizational performance, adding that leaders play a crucial role influencing other employee and organizational outcomes such as work engagement, reduction of role ambiguity and role conflict, and financial performance.

Mendes and Stander (2011) posited that leadership style and psychological empowerment are significantly related to feelings of empowerment, adding that employees who perceive their environments as predictable and consistent are more engaged in their work. Chow (2018) added that empowering leadership serves as a motivational factor for employee behavior and consequently improved employee performance. Empowering leadership enhances work engagement, provides employees with autonomy and self-determination, and positively fosters shared decision-making. According to Engelbrecht, Heine, and Mahembe (2017), employee engagement strengthens organizational trust and results in improved productivity and employee organizational commitment. Trust positively influences turnover intentions (Osman, Noordin, Daud, & Othman, 2016).

Social exchange theory suggests that trust enhances the quality of the relationship between leaders and subordinates (Engelbrecht et al., 2017). Rice et al. (2017) noted that social exchange theory offers a theoretical framework for understanding employee

engagement, as well as the social interaction between employees and their leaders. Osman et al. (2016) agreed, stating that social exchange theory edifices how social relationships enable employee engagement and positively influences retention. In examining social exchange theory and employee turnover, Rahman and Nas (2013) found that relationships develop over time into loyal, trusting, and mutual commitments, and as such, employee development initiatives can generate positive associations with the firm which can affect an employee's turnover intentions. According to Osman et al. (2016), social exchange theory employs trust, fairness, teamwork, and leadership support to foster a meaningful work environment and improved employee-employer relationships. Fairness and organizational justice enhance the social relationship between members of the organization (Suifan et al., 2017).

Strategies that enhance organizational justice can improve job satisfaction, involvement, and reduce employee turnover. Gevrek, Spencer, Hudgins, and Chambers (2017) found that employees' perception of equity and justice of rewards may impact their turnover intentions. Ultimately, Stumpf et al. (2016) cautioned that business leaders who endeavor to retain talented professionals and knowledge-based workers should implement strategies that focus systematically on what motivates, rewards, and consequently, engages talented employees.

Transition

In Section 1, I provided a comprehensive review of the literature centered on the examination of peer-reviewed articles relevant to the conceptual framework of situational leadership, contingency, and path-goal theories, as well as the central tenets of employee

turnover, engagement, retention, and organizational commitment. The core element of the fundamental theory of situational leadership is that business leaders possess the ability to adapt their leadership approaches to changing organizational environments. Additionally, I described the background of the business problem, the problem statement, the purpose statement, the purpose of the study, and the nature of the study. Furthermore, in Section 1, I outlined the conceptual framework that grounded my literature research and the overarching research question, as well as supported the interview questions. I described the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study. More importantly, the outcomes to business practice and the implications for social change also formed a core component of Section 1 of this research study.

In Section 2, I discuss the method and design of the study. I identify my role as the primary researcher, describe the strategy I deployed to gain access to the participants, and the methods used to identify the sample population. I address potential ethical issues, while ensuring the anonymity of the participants selected. Also, I define the data collection process and technique, organization, and analysis methodology. Lastly, I outline how I ensured the reliability and validity of the study outcomes.

In Section 3, I present the findings of this study and discuss how business leaders may utilize these findings to solve the specific business problem and the potential implications for improving social change. Furthermore, I make recommendations for actions and future research, and discuss ways to improve upon any biases, assumptions, and delimitation on potential areas of future research. I reflect on my research experience

and insights gained throughout the doctoral research process, and ultimately, offer a conclusive statement on the overarching findings of this study.

Section 2: The Project

Section 2 of the study contains the following subsections: (a) purpose statement, (b) role of the researcher, (c) strategy for identifying and accessing participants of the study, (d) research method and research design, (e) population and sampling, (f) process for ethical research compliance, (g) techniques for data collection and data analysis, and finally, (h) a description of the steps to ensure and improve the reliability and validity of this study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the leadership strategies that automotive leaders used to mitigate middle management turnover. The targeted population comprised of six senior leaders within the automotive industry located in the north-eastern region of Trinidad. The implications for positive social change may include increased job retention and improved employee well-being within a supportive work environment. Job retention also facilitates a better standard of living for families of employees providing for their economic, social, and educational needs. High turnover rates at any level can contribute to increased poverty levels and intensified criminal activities in communities where the business operates. As such, the outcomes of the study may alleviate societal misfortunes consequent on job turnover or business failure, and improve the welfare of employees, their families, and communities.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research methodology, the researcher is fully absorbed within the area of study (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2014). Consequently, the researcher serves as the

primary research instrument, identifies and recruits study participants, effectively administers the interview process, and engages a cognitive framework of transcribing, coding, and analyzing the data collected from the interview process (Karagiozis, 2018; Loslever, Guidini Gonçalves, de Oliveira, & Kolski, 2019; Yin, 2017). During this study, I conducted semistructured interviews as the primary approach to obtaining more precise and rich data, thereby providing a deeper understanding and a more comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon.

Researchers use semistructured or in-depth interviews to gain a deeper, more authentic understanding of what is happening and the context surrounding the event or situation (Brown & Danaher, 2019; Saunders et al., 2015; Yin, 2017). Having worked in the automotive industry within Trinidad and Tobago for approximately nine years, I possessed a unique understanding of the industry and relied on my network to gain access to the selected participants. I obtained formal consent from each participant and approval to utilize multiple sources of data to enhance the reliability and validity of the study results.

To safeguard against challenges that may arise throughout the research process, researchers must also consider the importance of ethics in research. Ethical dilemmas occur before, during, and after the research process, and researchers must proactively address ethical dilemmas to ensure research credibility (Saunders et al., 2015).

Greenwood (2016) described research ethics as the behavioral standards that guide the research process and research outcomes to ensure the protection of the study subjects, the researcher, and the associated institution. I adhered to the protocols established in the

Belmont Report which outlines the ethical guidelines and principles for researchers involved in studying human subjects by focusing on the core principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1979). I exercised care in avoiding unethical practices to ensure the reliability and validity of the research findings.

Research bias is also a fundamental issue for researchers. According to Pannucci and Wilkins (2010), some degree of researcher bias is always present in research and could arise at any stage of the research process, that is, from the formulation of the research topic to publishing the research findings. To improve the quality of the research findings, researchers should examine their approach to the process through reflexivity. Researchers use the method of reflexivity to (a) improve transparency in their research process, (b) reflect on their biases, assumptions, and expectations, (c) bring their ideas and actions to a conscious level and create awareness of their influence on the research process, and (d) provide a rationale for their research decisions through valuable insights gained during the data gathering process (Carroll & Mesman, 2018; Cunningham & Carmichael, 2018; Rettke, Pretto, Spichiger, Frei, & Spirig, 2018; Saunders et al., 2015; Spiers, Morse, Olson, Mayan, & Barrett, 2018).

Ultimately, through the process of reflexivity, I identified any biases and assumptions that I could have introduced into the research process. Due to my experience within the industry, selection bias, participant bias, and researcher bias may have been present and may have influenced the research process. Selection bias occurs when the selection process does not facilitate proper randomization of the population. Participant

bias can occur as the interviewees may provide answers based on what they think I might want to hear. Researcher bias may also have been present in my recording of the responses based on my subjective view of the industry and consequently may have distorted my assessment of the experience of the study participants (Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010; Saunders et al., 2015; Wadams & Park, 2018). Therefore, I implemented strategies that improved the interview protocol to address these biases and avoid viewing the data collected through a personal lens.

To minimize selection bias, I contacted all the members of my targeted population. Yin (2017) noted that determining an appropriate sample size is paramount to justify the findings of a research study and is essential to establishing the reliability and validity of the research study. Additionally, to address issues of participant bias, I eliminated leading questions within the interview questionnaire. Eliminating leading questions ensures that the participants provide a real-life account of the phenomenon, resulting in more in-depth responses (Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010). Concerning researcher bias, I structured and standardized my approach to the process, ensuring that my introductory comments and behavioral stance remained consistent across all interviews.

Data saturation, triangulation, member checking, and ensuring thick descriptions of the data were strategies that I applied to limit my biases (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Harvey, 2015; Moon, 2019). Member checking allows research participants to validate the accuracy of the interpretation of their responses (Harvey, 2015; Saunders et al., 2015; Thomas, 2017). Additionally, ensuring data saturation and triangulation allows for the generalizability and replicability of the research findings (Saunders et al., 2015). Data

saturation occurs when the collection or inclusion of additional data fails to provide new insights into the study or when data coding no longer adds value (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Goffnett, Hayes, & Lepisto, 2016; Saunders et al., 2015). During the interview process, I ensured that data saturation was reached when the data collected from the study participants did not reveal any new insights into the phenomenon. Triangulation occurs when more than one independent source can authenticate the data, analysis, and findings of the research (Moon, 2019; Morse, 2015; Saunders et al., 2015). I used company records and documentation to triangulate the analysis and findings of this study. The use of data saturation, triangulation, and member checking can assist in mitigating biases within the study and improve the reliability and validity of the data collected during the interview process.

Participants

The primary focus of the researcher is to gain an understanding of underlying reasons and motivations that provide valuable insights into the problem, allow for idea generation, and to uncover prevalent trends in thought and opinion (Park & Park, 2016; Saunders et al., 2015). Consequently, selecting the right study participants necessitates the achievement of the study outcomes (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The principal selection criteria for participants of this study was six senior leaders within the automotive industry who had successfully developed and implemented leadership strategies that mitigated middle management turnover within their organizations.

Additionally, to be eligible to participate in this study, these senior leaders must have held a senior leadership role for more than five years, have at least one middle

manager reporting to them, and had no turnover at the middle management level over the past three years. Furthermore, these participants must have been located in the north-eastern region of Trinidad. Consequently, I used purposive sampling for this study. According to Saunders et al. (2015) and Palinkas et al. (2015), purposive sampling involves selecting participants that will best enable the answering of the research question and research objectives.

Unencumbered access to participants, as well as relevant research data that will inform the study, is crucial to the research process (Peticca-Harris, de Gama, & Elias, 2016). Saunders et al. (2015) noted that fully disclosing the purpose of the research and the research process should allow unencumbered physical, continuing, and cognitive access to the relevant data and information needed to ensure a comprehensive research study. Different types of access and levels of access provide a researcher with options that support easy and crucial access to data and participants (Saunders et al., 2015; Yin, 2017). Strategies that I employed centered on the fact that I previously worked within the automotive sector in Trinidad at a senior level. Vuban and Eta (2019) noted that the researcher should utilize their network and knowledge of the industry to connect and build a rapport with business leaders. Additionally, Råheim et al. (2016) suggested that developing an effective relationship with study participants supports the successful outcome of the research process. Therefore, my tenure and more importantly, my relationships with leaders across the industry afforded me some access to the selected participants, albeit that at times, I was challenged to establish a convenient time and place for the interviews due to the availability of these senior leaders.

Initially, I utilized the telephone to establish contact, and thereafter I obtained approval via a signed letter of cooperation. The letter of cooperation outlined the purpose of the study, the researcher details, and underscored the voluntary element of the study, providing the participants with the knowledge that they can withdraw from the study at any stage during the process. Each study participant consented to participating in the study prior to the start of the face-to-face interview. Based on the outcomes of this study, these leaders, over time, successfully implemented leadership strategies that supported the retention of middle management employees in their company.

Research Method and Design

The purpose of the study was to explore the leadership strategies that automotive leaders used to mitigate middle management turnover. Semistructured in-depth interviews were the primary approach to obtaining a deeper understanding and a more comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon. As such, unlike a quantitative approach which requires statistical testing to determine causal relationships, a quantitative methodology was deemed most appropriate for this study. Within the context of qualitative research, researchers may realize richer insights into the study participants' lived experiences (Almalki, 2016; Antunes & Franco, 2016; McCusker & Gunaydin, 2014). Ultimately, I selected a multiple case study design for this study. Yin (2017) noted that a multiple case study design results in more robust findings grounded in many empirical evidences and allows for replication of the findings.

Research Method

Three main research methods exist, namely, quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method. The identified research problem determines the choice of the research method, as well as the research design. For this study, I used a qualitative research methodology to explore the leadership strategies that automotive leaders used to mitigate middle management turnover. According to Saunders et al., (2015) qualitative research design is usually characterized by a requirement to understand the experiences and attitudes of social context using a variety of data collection techniques and analytical processes to answer questions about the (a) what, (b) how, or (c) why of a phenomenon to develop a conceptual framework. Researchers utilize qualitative data to acquire a deep understanding of survey responses and statistical analysis based on a detailed assessment of response patterns (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2014). More importantly, qualitative researchers seek to expound on the participants' account of the phenomenon (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Through semistructured and in-depth interviews, I endeavored to adequately address the research question that anchored this study, and in so doing, obtained a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. As such, a qualitative research methodology supported the approach for this study

Quantitative research involves examining the relationship between two or more significant variables, using numeric analysis of the data collected to test, prove and verify these relations via hypotheses (Almalki, 2016; Landrum & Garza, 2015). The objective of this study was on exploring leadership strategies that mitigated middle management turnover and consequently did not necessitate the use of variables and statistical testing of

data collected to determine relational conjectures. Mixed methods research creates inherent challenges for researchers requiring skills in both qualitative and quantitative approaches, and involves the collection of both numeric and narrative data which presents challenges in planning and implementing one approach by drawing on the findings of another (Almalki, 2016; McCusker & Gunaydin, 2014). Accordingly, I did not select a mixed method approach for this study.

Research Design

The fundamental research strategies utilized in qualitative research design includes narrative research, ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, and case study research design (Glenn & Urquhart, 2019; Saunders et al., 2015). A case study is an in-depth and detailed investigation of the development of a single event, situation, or an individual or group of people, over a period of time, within a real-world context. Case study research supports a holistic comprehension of the phenomenon as shared by the individuals involved (Yin, 2017). Thus, the utilization of a case study design is more appropriate for exploring the leadership strategies that mitigate middle management turnover. Consequently, a successful case study utilizes multiple sources of evidence and is always context-sensitive, holistic, systematic, layered, and comprehensive. Such an approach supports a broader understanding of the research subject and goes beyond the surface (Saunders et al., 2015; Yin, 2017). Accordingly, I selected a multiple case study design for this study.

Other qualitative research design approaches did not support the level of exploration needed for understanding the research problem. Phenomenological research

is rooted in the complexities of philosophical and human science and is concerned with lived experiences focused on participant's recollection and interpretation of those experiences as they occurred to garner broad meaning and insights into those phenomena (Adams & van Manen, 2017; Saunders et al., 2015). Data collection for phenomenological researchers occurs primarily through interviews requiring the researcher to conduct several interview sessions with each participant to garner further information and clarity of responses (Adams & van Manen, 2017; Saunders et al., 2015). However, a researcher engaged in case study design utilizes a combination of data collection techniques which provides richer qualitative data for analysis and reduces the time and costs associated with re-engagement of participants (Wilson, 2015). Narrative inquiry design centers on personal accounts or storytelling to preserve the chronology of events (Campbell, 2014). Ethnography relates to studying members of a cultural group in their natural setting (Saunders et al., 2015). Grounded theory design involves discovering theory from data analysis (Mohajan, 2018). Ultimately, narrative research, ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology research design were not suitable for the required in-depth and rich analysis and exploration of this research study.

In qualitative research design, the attainment of data saturation is essential to the research process. Fusch and Ness (2015) described data saturation as the point at which the researcher cannot discern any new thematic information from the responses obtained from the interviewees. Moser and Korstjens (2018) confirmed that data saturation occurs when emerging themes are replicated by different study participants, and when analysis of the data by the researcher reveals no new themes. Selecting the correct sample size is

also integral to data saturation. According to Tran, Porcher, Falissard, and Ravaud (2016), several factors can affect the sample size required to achieve data saturation, namely, the relevance of the topic, the selection of the study participants, the data collection methodology, and the data analysis strategies. Therefore, to ensure that I achieved data saturation, I interviewed participants until no original themes emerged from the answers received to my interview questions. Consequently, data saturation was attained when little or no variations result from the responses recorded from participants of the study. I achieved data saturation with the sixth participant.

Population and Sampling

The population for the study comprised of senior leaders within the new automotive industry located in the north-eastern region of Trinidad. These senior leaders would have deployed leadership strategies which successfully mitigated middle management turnover. Data was collected primarily from interviews conducted with these leaders and supplemented by documentation and records of the company. Leaders across the automotive industry who have not successfully implemented strategies that mitigated middle management was not eligible for participation in this study. As such, I chose purposive sampling to select participants for this study. Researchers who apply purposive sampling utilize their judgment to choose participants that best enable the answering of the research question and research objectives, and provide data that confer an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Ames, Glenton, & Lewin, 2019; Palinkas et al., 2015; Saunders et al., 2015). Although the main goal of a purposive sample is to collect cases with rich information that support the purpose of the study, researchers warn

that purposive sampling could result in judgment errors, increase biases, and limit the generalization of research findings (Ames et al., 2019; El-Masri, 2017; Walker, 2012).

The automotive industry in Trinidad and Tobago comprised of seven main companies which inherently limits the total number of senior executives that work within the industry. Based on this limitation, I strived to achieve a 100% participation rate and did not engage in any sampling techniques. When a population consists of fewer than 50 members, a sampling technique is not advisable and therefore, it is recommended that the researcher collect data from all members of the target population (Boddy, 2016; Martínez-Mesa, González-Chica, Duquia, Bonamigo, & Bastos, 2016; Saunders et al., 2015). Notwithstanding, Palinkas et al. (2015) noted that for small sample sizes, purposive sampling was appropriate. Furthermore, a large sample size is sometimes problematic and not required to achieve data adequacy or a complete assessment of the phenomenon (Vasileiou, Barnett, Thorpe, & Young, 2018). My sample size for the study was six senior leaders. A small number of participants can offer researchers the depth of understanding on the subject matter within the context of qualitative research (Martínez-Mesa et al., 2016; Saunders et al., 2015; Yin, 2017). In this regard, I interviewed each participant using the same interview instrument, and recorded and coded the responses provided. Ultimately, I collected sufficient information via interviews that could facilitate replication of the study outcomes under similar conditions, in different settings and until data saturation was achieved.

For maximum results, I conducted these interviews in a setting where the study participants identified as most appropriate and convenient. Establishing a setting where

the interviewee feels comfortable can build trust and rapport, particularly with executives who may display dominant behaviors believing to have superior knowledge about the subject matter; subsequently impeding the ability of the researcher to collect data that is deemed useful (Vuban & Eta, 2019). Saunders et al. (2015) noted that face-to-face interviews enable the researcher to establish rapport with the interviewee resulting in rich insights into the phenomenon. Where the interviewee cannot facilitate a face-to-face meeting, the telephone would be a secondary medium. However, using the telephone limits the researcher's ability to accurately interpret nonverbal cues or employ probing questions to explore deeper meanings of the responses, which can impact the richness of the data collected (Saunders et al., 2015). Primarily, I obtained data for my study via face-to-face interviews.

Ethical Research

Researchers must endeavor to ensure the protection of their study participants (Greenwood, 2016; Taylor & Thomas-Gregory, 2015). Saunders et al. (2015) defined ethics in research as the standards of behavior that guide the conduct of the researcher. Researchers must, therefore, anticipate any ethical issues which may arise. Such issues may occur before engaging the study, during the research process, at the point the researcher is collecting and analyzing data (Roth & von Unger, 2018). Regardless of the method of data collection, the researcher must ensure protocols that safeguard the participants and implement strategies that minimize ethical issues and consequently, avoid harm to human subjects (Greenwood, 2016; McLaughlin, Gomez, Deapen, & Induni, 2017).

Developing and applying a code of ethics guide researchers and safeguards the research process to avoid harm to an individual or collective group of participants, as well as ensure the integrity and objectivity of the researchers (Greenwood, 2016; Haines, 2017; Saunders et al., 2015). Implementing strategies to minimize ethical dilemmas is essential. Ethical considerations include ensuring participants that the data gathered will be treated confidentially and not shared with any of the other participants in the study. The provision of confidentiality agreements and consent forms should alleviate any ethical concerns by the parties involved as well as the ensuring the non-disclosure of the identities of the participants either directly or indirectly (Saunders et al., 2015). Fundamental to ethical research practice is ensuring that participants understand the context of research study and therefore, consent to participating in the study.

Obtaining approval from human subjects before engaging their participation is required for ethical research. Researchers obtain this approval via informed consent. According to Adams et al. (2017) and Øye, Sørensen, and Glasdam (2016), informed consent represents the process by which researchers provide human subjects with adequate information about a study that allows participants to make decisions about the benefits of the study, as well as the risks associated with participating. Consequently, researchers should balance the risks and benefits to be derived from a study, before undertaking same (Adams et al., 2017; Gallagher et al., 2016; McLaughlin et al., 2017; Øye et al., 2016). Gallagher et al. (2016) suggested that the principle of informed consent is also grounded on the basis that participation is voluntary and that participants can withdraw at any time.

Study participants must be made aware of their right to withdraw from a study (Adams et al., 2017). As a result, I obtained the participants' expressed consent to participate, by having them sign the consent form voluntarily. Additionally, I provided each participant with as many details about the study to include (a) the purpose of the study, (b) the potential impact, (c) the right to participate or not, and (d) the right to withdraw at any time without any punitive results. I provided participants with the consent form provided by Walden University. Upon signing the consent form in agreement to participate in the study, I again reminded them of their right to withdraw from the study at any time and outlined the process by which they could withdraw from the study. I only engaged the study after I received approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Primarily an IRB protects the rights, dignity, welfare, and safety of the participants and the researcher (Saunders et al., 2015). The Walden University's IRB approval number for this study is 11-04-190498980.

Once participants agreed to be part of the study, I assigned each participant with a unique participant code. Researchers are ethically bound to ensure the confidentiality of their human subjects (Allen & Wiles, 2016). The use of codes instead of participant names protects and safeguards participants' identities. Confidentiality allows researchers to build rapport and trust with study participants and subsequently improves the interviewee's ability to provide a more in-depth account of the phenomenon (Vuban & Eta, 2019). Assigning aliases or codes to each participant provide a technical and psychological benefit to researchers. According to Allen and Wiles (2016), aliases or

codes allow researchers to balance the requirement of ethics and participant confidentiality, and thus, preserve the integrity of the data.

Beginning at the end of the research process and upon obtaining approval from the Walden University Chief Academic Officer, I will maintain the data collected from each participant for five years. I will store the data on a flash drive in a fireproofed bank safe whereby I have direct and singular access to the information. The act of securely storing the data for five years is to protect the rights of the individuals who participated in the study. At the end of the 5-year period, I will personally destroy all files related to the study by either shredding or burning. To ensure transparency, I provided each participant with a summary of my research findings.

Data Collection Instruments

Researchers must select their data collection instruments, prudently (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Within qualitative research, the researcher represents the primary data collection and data analysis instrument (Barrett & Twycross, 2018; Clark & Vealé, 2018; Sutton & Austin, 2015). Researchers Heath, Williamson, Williams, and Harcourt (2018), Moser and Korstjens (2018), and Wheeldon (2018) acknowledged that face-to-face interviews represent the standard for gathering data from study participants. For this study, I was the primary data collection instrument. I used face-to-face semistructured interviews and reviewed company records and documentation to gather data for this study.

Semistructured Interviews

By using a semistructured interview technique, researchers may obtain more precise, rich data, and could acquire a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Barrett & Twycross, 2018; Saunders et al., 2015; Yin, 2017). I gathered evidence through face to face, semistructured interviews and asked each participant specific open-ended questions (Appendix A) which allowed me to collect data from the study participants on the leadership strategies they used to reduce middle management turnover. To enhance the data collection process, I developed and applied an interview protocol (Appendix B), to ensure a structured and comprehensive approach to each interview session. An interview protocol enhances the effectiveness of the interview process and improves the quality of the data collected within the time allocated (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Yeong, Ismail, Ismail, & Hamzah, 2018). I asked probing questions to clarify any ambiguous responses provided to the questions. Each interview lasted approximately 25-30 minutes. I arranged to conduct the interviews at a location and time that was convenient for each participant. I recorded the responses of each participants using a digital voice recorder and summarized their responses for the purpose of member checking to enhance the reliability and validity of the study.

Documentation

In addition to performing semistructured interviews, as a secondary data collection method, I formally requested permission to review company documentation and records such as the performance appraisals of the middle managers, company policy and procedures, corporate training plans, and any other records that were available.

Researchers use documentation to triangulate other data and provide unobtrusive, specific data that support a researchers' broader understanding of the phenomenon (Johnson, Maughan, Bergren, Wolfe, & Gerdes, 2017; Sutton & Austin, 2015; Yin, 2017). Though interviews are a primary data source of case study research, analyzing multiple sources of evidence such as documentation improves the credibility of the study outcomes (Johnson et al., 2017; Sutton & Austin, 2015; Yin, 2017). Through the review and analysis of documents and other company records, I was able to gather pertinent information relevant to the strategies used by leaders to mitigate middle management turnover.

Member Checking

Improving the reliability and validity of the data collection instrument is paramount for researchers (Heale & Twycross, 2015). Researchers use member checking to increase reliability, enhance the richness of the data collected, to validate the accuracy of the interpretation of the participants' responses, and authenticate the study conclusions (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Morse, 2015; Saunders et al., 2015). I used member checking to determine my accuracy in interpreting the responses of the participants. Following the interviews, I shared my interpretations with respective participants for validation.

Data Collection Technique

Data collection technique refers to the procedures applied by researchers to collect or analyze data and are reliant on the research methodology deployed by the researcher (Chu & Ke, 2017). Interviews represent the most common data collection technique in qualitative research (Figgou & Pavlopoulos, 2015; Saunders et al., 2015; Yin, 2017). Saunders et al. (2015) identified three main types of interviews: (a)

structured, (b) semistructured, and (c) unstructured. Semistructured interview formats allow researchers to obtain responses to predetermined questions, as well as gain more significant insights into the phenomenon through open-ended questions that enable the interviewees the freedom and flexibility to provide reflective insights based on their perspective (Brown & Danaher, 2019; Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Saunders et al., 2015).

Semistructured Interviews

I used face-to-face, semistructured interviews as my primary data collection technique. I asked the same series of open-ended interview questions (see Appendix A) to each study participant and took written notes to document the participants' verbal responses and non-verbal cues in response to the questions. Adhering to an established interview protocol (Appendix B) supported the structured approach to the interview process. After receiving approval from Walden University's IRB, I contacted each participant and arranged a convenient time and location to conduct the interview. After introductions, I reiterated the purpose of the research study and obtained consent to record the session via digital voice recorder and notetaking. Recording and summarizing the participants' responses, mitigate issues related to data quality (Saunders et al., 2015). Furthermore, I reminded participants that his or her identity and responses will be kept confidential and that the data collected will be securely stored for five years and then destroyed.

Regardless of the selected technique for data collection, researchers must be mindful of the advantages and disadvantages of each type. Face-to-face interviews provide researchers with an opportunity to probe responses and record non-verbal cues

for more significant meaning, as well as allow for the focus to be placed on the case study topic, conducting face-to-face interviews could be costly and time-consuming (Chu & Ke, 2017; Wheeldon, 2018; Yin, 2017). Barrett and Twycross (2018), Saunders et al. (2015), and Yin (2017) noted that the use of face-to-face interviews can result in response bias and researcher bias and that researchers should avoid asking leading questions during the interview session that can also bias the outcome and thus, minimize the reliability and validity of the data collected.

Documentation

Using company records and documentation support researchers' ability to triangulate data collected via other sources. Company records, provided by the participant including performance appraisals, training records, succession plans, policies, and procedures, provided more in-depth information about the strategies used by the interviewees to mitigate middle management turnover. Documentation forms part of a comprehensive data collection strategy that facilitates a broader understanding of the phenomenon (Johnson et al., 2017; Jones & McCoy, 2019; Yin, 2017). I sought approval to access records and documentation dating back for a period of 3 years.

There are benefits and limitations of using documentation. Documentation and company records provide researchers with the opportunity to review records repeatedly and provide specific data that will corroborate other sources of data collected (Jones & McCoy, 2019; Saunders et al., 2015; Yin, 2017). However, the reliance on documentation or company records can be problematic for researchers. Issues related to the use of documentation include improper or inadequate data management systems (Johnson et al.,

2017; Yin, 2017). Improper cataloguing can result in incomplete information and be time-consuming for researchers (Johnson et al., 2017; Yin, 2017).

Member Checking

Member checking ensures the reliability and validity of the data collected during the study, validates the accuracy of my interpretation of the participants' responses, and thus facilitated the collection, analysis and interpretation of data collected from the study participants (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Morse, 2015; Saunders et al., 2015). I used member checking after every interview to validate the interviewee's responses to the interview questions. I shared the paraphrased responses with the respondent and allowed a stipulated timeframe of two weeks to review and advise of any amendments.

Member checking can add value to the research process or prolong the finalization of the study. According to researchers Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, and Walter, (2016), Harvey (2015), Morse (2015), and Thomas (2017), a main advantage of member checking include the researcher's ability to examine and clarify the interview transcripts to establish credibility and validity of qualitative research findings. Notwithstanding, member checking may provide participants with an opportunity to change their responses or withdraw components of the data shared, thereby threatening the validity of the research findings and potentially extending the data analysis phase of the study, prolonging the researcher's ability to finalize the study in a timely manner (Birt et al., 2016; Morse, 2015; Saunders et al., 2015; Thomas, 2017). Consequently, Birt et al. (2016) and Thomas (2017) suggested that researchers abstract and synthesize the data obtained from participants to improve the value of member checking and minimize issues

which can prolong the finalization of the study. None of the participants withdrew any information shared during the data collection process.

Data Organization Technique

Data organization represents an essential element of the research process.

According to White, Oelke, and Friesen (2012), proper data organization techniques allow researchers to easily group data, code the data, and readily identify emerging themes. Analyzing qualitative data can be a daunting process for researchers requiring significant time and effort (Yakut Çayır & Saritaş, 2017). A computer-aided data analysis software improves the efficiency of the data organization process (Yakut Çayır & Saritaş, 2017). I used NVivo 12 software; a computer-aided data analysis software to assist in the organization of the data collected. I created and maintained electronic data files on a password-protected computer. These files will be transferred along with all other electronic data acquired during the research process to an encrypted flash drive and securely stored in a fireproofed bank safety deposit box whereby I will have sole access.

Data sources included voice recorded files, electronic interview transcripts, field notes, company records and documents, and coded data files. In addition to the electronic files, all hard copy data records will also be stored in the fireproof safety deposit box. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, I developed a participant coding system. Following the conclusion of my study and upon receiving Walden University Chief Academic Officer approval, all electronic and paper-based data will be stored for five years. Once the 5-year period has elapsed, I will effectively destroy all the electronic and hard copy files related to the study.

Data Analysis

Researchers Barrett and Twycross (2018), Saunders et al. (2015) and Yin (2017) stated that data analysis is an interactive process whereby data are systematically analyzed to identify recurring patterns and themes which emerge as a consequence of manipulating raw data either by tabulating the frequency of different statements or events, or by identifying sequencing in the data. Fusch and Ness (2015) suggested that data triangulation assists in providing multiple perspectives on the phenomenon. Methodological triangulation, the most common type of triangulation, involves the use of multiple methods of data collection about the same phenomenon and enhances the depth of the understanding of the phenomenon which improves data quality and interpretation (Abdalla, Oliveira, Azevedo, & Gonzalez, 2018; Drouin, Stewart, & Van Gorder, 2015; Fusch & Ness, 2015). I used methodological triangulation to enhance the validity of my study findings by analyzing and cross-referencing the data gathered from face-to-face interviews, documentation, other company records, and field notes.

Different approaches to analyzing qualitative data exists. Researchers Castleberry and Nolen (2018) and Yin (2014) described a logical and systematic approach to data analysis which includes (a) compiling data into a useable format, (b) disassembling data to create groupings, (c) reassembling data to develop themes, (d) interpreting the data, and (e) drawing conclusions. I applied Yin's 5-step data analysis process as follows:

Compiling

Compiling involves organizing all the data into an orderly manner to create a database. Yin (2017) advised that a case study database is essential for organizing

primary and secondary data collected during the data collection phase. During the compiling step, researchers transcribe, collates, and organizes the data into a database (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Yin, 2014). Familiarization of the data at this phase is essential for researchers. Through familiarization, researchers obtain a comprehensive understanding of the entire data set (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Yin, 2014). I summarized the interview responses, and through member checking, validated the participants' responses. In addition to the member checked responses, I collated and organized data received from my field notes and my review of company documentation and reports and methodologically triangulated the data. I used NVivo 12 software to arrange the data from all sources into categories. Once I structured the data in a consistent and organized manner, I dissected the data.

Disassembling

Disassembling involves dissecting the data into meaningful groups using coding. Coding refers to the process in which data is categorized to determine similarities in concepts, ideas, or themes (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Yin, 2014). Using coding to convert patterns identified in participants' statements and subsequently organize the data, is an essential process in data analysis. Coding allows the researcher to make sense out of the text data, dividing the text data into segments that reveal themes, and provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon through descriptive and thematic development (Ganapathy, 2016; Saunders et al., 2015). Ultimately, coding allows researchers to efficiently manage, retrieve, and rearrange data based on specific codes (Ganapathy, 2016; Saunders et al., 2015). I used NVivo 12 to code my data. Having all the data

categorized, I labelled and grouped data by category. Upon completion of the disassembling phase, I progressed to reassembling the data.

Reassembling

During reassembly, the researcher gathers all relevant data into separate potential themes and categories, sequences, and groups the data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Yin, 2014). Grouping coded statements aids in identifying central themes within the data. Blair (2016) suggested a systematic examination, line by line, to ensure a comprehensive assessment and more profound insights into the coding process. Applying the coding process to each participant interview transcript allowed me to identify sub-themes. Based on recurrent information within the data, similar coded statements are grouped, and central and recurrent themes materialize (Blair, 2016; Mohajan, 2018; Saunders et al., 2015). I used NVivo 12 software to amalgamate similarly coded statements into categories to identify core and recurrent themes across all data sources.

Interpreting

In the interpreting step, the goal is to garner a comprehensive understanding of the study by crafting descriptive statements based on the main themes which evolved during the reassembly phase (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) suggested that the interpretation of the data should be complete, fair, accurate, and credible. By interpreting the data, the researcher can develop a thematic mapping of the codes and themes, providing a more extensive and more detailed assessment of the phenomenon based on the identification of thematic patterns across all the data (Castleberry & Nolen,

2018; Yin, 2014). I used NVivo 12 software to aid in identifying emerging themes related to my central research question. I then concluded my data analysis.

Concluding

At the final phase of concluding the data analysis, the researcher must provide a detailed description of the data analysis process including the procedure and criteria for coding, and the method used for identifying themes conclude the data analysis process (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Yin, 2014). Researchers should identify any new concepts and theories, and the study should be generalized for future research (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Yin, 2014). I concluded my data analysis by identifying similarities in patterns and themes. I compared the central and recurrent emergent themes to the literature review and conceptual framework of the study primarily to answer the central question of the study: “What leadership strategies do automotive leaders use to mitigate middle management turnover?”

Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) assist qualitative researchers in assigning codes, creating mind maps, and generating themes based on word frequency (Woods, Macklin, & Lewis, 2016; Yakut Çayir & Saritaş, 2017; Yin, 2017). Qualitative researchers use computer software to organize large data sets by separating data into categories, formulating themes, and generating a report (Woods et al., 2016; Yakut Çayir & Saritaş, 2017). Using NVivo 12 software, I analyzed all the primary and secondary data collected throughout the research process to identify patterns and themes which informed the findings of the study.

Within the context of business research, conclusions drawn from research should build on existing theory and should enable a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, thereby extending the broader academic debate (Crane, Henriques, Husted, & Matten, 2016; Yin, 2017). To ensure a deeper understanding of the data, Crane et al. suggested that researchers use figures and tables to summarize their data and translate their findings to a broader audience, more easily. Additionally, Sutton and Austin (2015) suggested that researchers use direct quotations to synthesize participants' responses and to readily identify and organize themes to draw conclusions from the data. I used direct quotations to identify and organize recurring themes across data sets and presented my data using tables and figures. I correlated these key themes with recent studies, as well as the literature review, conceptual framework, and central research question of my study. Of note, the key themes in my literature review included organizational commitment, employee engagement, employee and management retention, and employee turnover. The conceptual framework for my study was Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership theory which is founded on the premise that based on the situation; leaders select the most appropriate style and behavior (Bosse et al., 2017; Hersey & Blanchard, 1982). To ensure a comprehensive approach, I reviewed other complementary leadership theories, including path-goal theory and contingency theory. The research question which guided my study was: "What leadership strategies do automotive leaders use to mitigate middle management turnover?"

Reliability and Validity

Two distinct criteria exist for assessing rigor in qualitative research, namely, reliability and validity. In qualitative research, rigor refers to the transferability, credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research, and determines whether the research findings are accurate and credible (Cadez, Dimovski, & Zaman Groff, 2017; Heale & Twycross, 2015; Morse, 2015; Yin, 2017; Zhao, Beckett, & Wang, 2017). Reliability refers to replicability or consistency of the research findings and validity implies the degree to which the research study is accurate and established on facts. Validity also relates to the appropriateness and alignment between the research process and the research findings (Heale & Twycross, 2015; Morse, 2015; Saunders et al., 2015; Yin, 2017).

Ultimately, reliability and validity can allow others to critique, analyze, or replicate the research findings. Strategies that ensure reliability and validity in qualitative research includes data saturation, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, member checking, peer-review or debriefing, reflexivity, establishing an audit trail, and ensuring thick descriptions of the data (Bernardi & Steyn, 2019; Goffnett et al., 2016; Rettke et al., 2018; Spiers et al., 2018). Unique to case study design, strategies for achieving reliability and validity include using multiple sources of evidence, applying logic models, developing a case study database, and establishing a chain of evidence (Yin, 2017). I assured validity through data saturation, member checking, methodological triangulation, and reflexivity.

Reliability

Consistency in the research process assures the dependability of the study and the replicability of the research process and research findings under similar circumstances (Ko, Lee, Birch, & Lee, 2017; Leung, 2015; Noble & Smith, 2015). Dependability ensures that the research findings are consistent and can be replicated based on the standards by which the research is conducted and analyzed (Colorafi & Evans, 2016; Moon, 2019; Saunders et al., 2015). Dependability involves evaluating the findings as well as the interpretation and recommendations of the study against the data collected to determine the constancy of the results (Moser & Korstjens, 2018; White et al., 2012). Establishing protocols that ensure consistency during the data collection phase, specifically during the interview process, improves the reliability of the study outcomes (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Yeong et al., 2018; Yin, 2017). I used an interview protocol (Appendix B) to ensure a consistent approach to the interview process.

Through member checking, researchers test for replication of responses using different subgroups of the same research population and allows participants to validate the accuracy of the interpretation of their responses (Harvey, 2015; Morse, 2015; Saunders et al., 2015). I advised participants of the process of member checking and provided an opportunity for them to validate their responses. Achieving data saturation in qualitative research is another strategy for ensuring reliability. Data saturation occurs when the inclusion of additional data fails to provide new insights into the study or when further data coding is no longer feasible (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Saunders et al., 2015;

Walker, 2012). I ensured that data saturation was reached during my research process and thus assured the dependability of my study findings.

Validity

Researchers FitzPatrick (2019), Leung (2015), and Spiers et al. (2018) described validity as the appropriateness of the data, instrument, and process. Criteria for assessing validity include credibility, confirmability, transferability, and data saturation.

Credibility. Credibility refers to the richness of the data collected, which supports the authenticity or believability of the findings (Moon, 2019). Credibility produces a complete knowledge of the phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2015). Credibility is essential for establishing internal validity which according to Saunders et al. (2015) is the extent to which the research findings are credible and are without flaws or errors in either the data collection, data analysis, or results of the research. Researchers FitzPatrick (2019), Harvey (2015), and Thomas (2017) suggested that member checking and data triangulation enhanced credibility. Harvey (2015) described member checking as the process of obtaining participants' view on the accuracy of the data collected and the interpretations. Harvey (2015) and Thomas (2017) concurred that member checking is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility. Abdalla et al., (2018) and Drouin et al., (2015) explained that through methodological triangulation, researchers use both primary data and secondary data to ensure credibility. I used member checking and methodological triangulation to enhance credibility in my research study.

Transferability. Transferability refers to the extent to which study results can be replicated within a similar context or setting (Colorafi & Evans, 2016; Saunders et al.,

2015; Weis & Willems, 2017). Through the provision of a detailed account of the research questions, research design, conceptual framework, findings, and analysis, the researcher provides an opportunity for readers to assess the level of transferability of the study to similar fields of research (Saunders et al., 2015). Using thick description enables judgments about how well the researcher defined the research process, from the data collection phase to the report generation, and helps other researchers replicate the study under similar conditions, in different settings (Leung, 2015; Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Saunders et al., 2015). To achieve transferability, I adhered to the prescribed data collection techniques, data analysis techniques, and the interview protocol. Furthermore, I provided rich, thick descriptions of the process, the selection, and identification of the participants, and the methodology and research design to establish transferability.

Confirmability. Researchers Ko et al. (2017), Moser and Korstjens (2018), and Saunders et al. (2015) summarized that confirmability attests to the accuracy and objectivity of the data collection method, and is concerned with substantiating that the data collection and data analysis, are not fabricated and are based on data and facts. The use of reflexivity improves confirmability. Reflexivity reduces the personal biases of the researcher, which can influence the research process (Cunningham & Carmichael, 2018; Rettke et al., 2018; Spiers et al., 2018). I documented my biases, assumptions, and expectations during the research process to improve the objectivity of the data collection and data analysis process. Peer reviews or debriefing also achieves confirmability in qualitative research. The peer review or debriefing process enhances confirmability when other researchers can conclude similar findings based on the data collected. The value of

peer reviews is that it prevents subjective outcomes and increases the conceptual development of the associated theory and enhances confirmability (Bernardi & Steyn, 2019; Morse, 2015). Maintaining a comprehensive audit trail of the research approach and context, as well as the decision-making rationale, supports the achievement of confirmability in research studies (Moon, 2019; White et al., 2012). I kept a comprehensive and accurate record of the activities and approached applied during the data collection and the data analysis phase of the study.

Data saturation. I ensured the validity of my study through data saturation. Data saturation is an essential element of research. According to Saunders et al. (2015), data saturation defines the stage of the data collection process where any additional data provides little to no value or new insights into the study. Further, Fusch and Ness (2015) added that data saturation occurs when the quantity of the data collected allows for replication of the study, and when further coding is no longer feasible. Replication protects against false positive results and increases confidence that the research findings are trustworthy, reliable, credible, and valid (Maxwell, Lau, & Howard, 2015). In case study design, data saturation occurs where multiple cases are designed to substantiate each other, or where the cases are designed to encompass different theoretical conditions (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Yin, 2017). According to Moser and Korstjens (2018), researchers reach data saturation when new data result in repetitive information or where no new themes arise. To ensure data saturation, I interviewed participants until no new information or themes emerged. Data saturation was achieved and no new information was received after the sixth participant. I used methodological triangulation to validate

the data collected via face-to-face, semistructured interviews with secondary data collected from documentation and company records.

Transition and Summary

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the leadership strategies that automotive leaders used to mitigate middle management turnover. In Section 2, I discussed the method and design of the study. Other topics covered in Section 2 included the role of the researcher, participant selection, research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments, data collection technique, data organization techniques, data analysis, and reliability and validity. Section 3 includes the presentation of my findings, application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for future research, reflections, and my conclusions.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the leadership strategies that automotive leaders used to mitigate middle management turnover. I used purposive sampling to select six senior leaders within the new automotive sales industry who successfully implemented leadership strategies that mitigated middle management turnover at their company. Data were collected using face-to-face, semistructured interviews and reviewing documentation shared by the participants such as performance assessment instruments, corporate training plans, and succession planning matrices. I also utilized member checking with each research participant. Through the application of methodological triangulation and data analysis, four themes emerged: (a) coaching, (b) performance-related pay, (c) career growth and development, and (d) person-job alignment. In this section, I present the findings of the study, consider the application to professional practice and implications for social change. I also outline recommendations for further research, reflect on the research process, and conclude my study.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question for this study was: “What leadership strategies do automotive leaders use to mitigate middle management turnover?” To answer the research question, I conducted face-to-face, semistructured interviews with six senior leaders in the new automotive sales industry who successfully mitigated turnover at the middle management level in their companies located in the north-eastern region of Trinidad. The length of each interview ranged from 25 to 30 minutes. Each interview was

recorded using a digital voice recorder application on my phone, and each participant was provided with the paraphrased responses to the recordings via email and allowed a 2-week period to review and advise of any amendments.

Data saturation was attained, and no new information was received after the sixth participant. Participants were eligible to participate in the study if they fulfilled the following eligibility requirements, held a senior leadership role for more than five years, had at least one middle manager reporting to them, and had no turnover at the middle management level in the past three years. Table 2 provides a summary of the participants' eligibility to participate in the study. Alphanumerical codes from P1 to P6 were assigned to all six participants to protect the confidentiality of each participant.

Table 2

Summary of Participant Eligibility and Alphanumeric Code

Eligibility criteria	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Senior leader for more than 5 years	1	1	1	1	1	1
One or more middle manager reports	1	1	1	1	1	1
No middle manager turnover in 3 yrs.	1	1	1	1	1	1

Note. Yes = 1 No = 0

I utilized Microsoft Word, as well as a transcription software was used to transcribe the data from the interview, and during the member checking process to summarize my interpretation of the responses of each participant to ensure accuracy. I also utilized NVivo 12 and Microsoft Excel to assist in analyzing the data. Applying methodological triangulation and data analysis, I identified four main themes: (a)

coaching, (b) performance-related pay, (c) career growth and development, and (d) person-job alignment.

Theme 1: Coaching

All six participants underscored the importance of coaching as a strategy for successfully mitigating middle management turnover. The participants mentioned that providing leadership support through coaching, enabled their middle managers to thrive and be successful in their field. As depicted in Figure 1, all participant responses highlighted the need for coaching as a strategy for reducing turnover of middle managers at their firm.

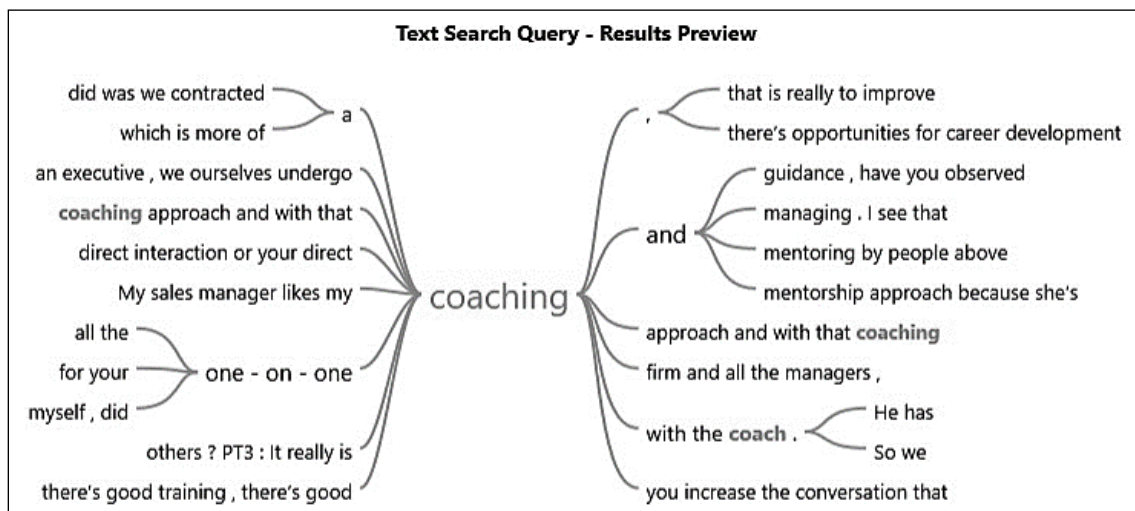


Figure 1. Work tree for theme 1.

According to the participants in the study, leadership coaching resulted in a higher level of engagement between themselves and their managers and created an environment for improved collaboration and commitment to the company. In a study conducted by Zuñiga-Collazos, Castillo-Palacio, Montaña-Narváez, and Castillo-Arévalo (2020) which examined the direct influence of coaching on job performance, organizational

commitment, and turnover intentions, the researchers agreed, noting that coaching enhances employee competencies, improves organizational performance, and positively influences individual and team commitment. Minzlaff (2019) also shared this view and concluded that coaching provided a platform for developing knowledge and leadership effectiveness, which in turn the researcher noted, can lead to enhanced job satisfaction and performance and organizational success, particularly in a competitive environment.

Within this context, P2 stated that “all the one-on-one coaching, that is really to improve them as managers, personally and professionally.” P3 shared,

With coaching, you increase the conversation that you have with middle management. Not just job-related, but what they want and how they are going to fit in, deliver, achieve their aspirations. From my leadership style, I find that the conversations yield much better results.

P5 agreed that through direct engagement and direct coaching, “good leaders can understand their people and what makes them motivated and want to do well.” P6 outlined his approach to leadership as being facilitative, stating that,

If there’s a problem, my usual first response is, ask them what they want to do. I would usually avoid recommending or giving an answer if they haven’t first put forward a suggestion. I don’t want them to be followers, I want them to be leaders.

P1 and P4 noted that leadership support on a one-on-one basis enables their middle managers to achieve their objectives and to become successful. In furtherance of my assessment of coaching as a core strategy for managing the middle management level of

the organization, I briefly reviewed documents that included 360-degree leadership assessment reports that supported the focus on coaching as a development tool, as well as viewed training evaluation feedback forms from a training workshop from one participating firm. Of the participants interviewed, five out of six of the participants or 83% of the participants produced documentation in support of this theme.

Ultimately, through coaching, senior leaders can support an environment wherein middle managers can achieve their personal and professional objectives, and organizational outcomes can be realized. Bozer and Delegach (2019) agreed that coaching allowed for both individual and organizational achievement. Individuals benefited from being better able to anticipate and navigate challenges in their work environment that may impede job performance, while organizational leaders who assumed the role of coach, benefited by reducing risks associated with talent retention and effective succession planning. Despite these positive outcomes, Luo and Liu (2014) cautioned that coaching may not result in increased organizational citizenship behaviors among employees.

The conceptual framework of the SLII model aligns with the theme of coaching in this study. The SLII framework incorporates four key leadership styles that allow leaders to amend their style based on the maturity and readiness of the follower to achieve the best outcome. One such leadership style aligned to the SLII framework is coaching. Developing coaching abilities is one approach wherein a leader can alter their leadership style to fit the needs of the follower, consequently, improving the performance of the

individual (Wright, 2017). Lynch (2015) underscored the importance of leader supported coaching noting that leadership coaching behaviors help operationalise the SLII model.

Theme 2: Performance-Related Pay

All the research participants expressed the importance of a robust performance-related pay strategy for alleviating turnover at the middle management level. The participants discussed the relevance of acknowledging the efforts and achievements of middle managers in reducing their turnover intentions. Mustafa and Ali (2019) underscored the importance of an effective competency-based remuneration framework for ensuring the retention and autonomous motivation of employees. Notwithstanding the importance placed by the participants on this factor, Kuvaas, Buch, Gagne, Dysvik, and Forest (2016) suggested that there was no real alignment between performance-related compensation and turnover or autonomous motivation.

Ensuring a comprehensive and effective reward framework inclusive of intrinsic and extrinsic compensation can reduce employee turnover and increase their commitment to the business. Bussin and Thabethe (2018) proffered that a well-structured and appropriate compensation strategy can enhance employee job performance, foster a culture of high performance, reward competencies, and influence overall organizational performance. According to the participants, a performance-related pay system focuses on the efforts of middle management on achieving the agreed objectives and recognizes the attainment and effort of these accomplishments.

To ensure methodological triangulation, I requested and was allowed to review performance assessment templates utilized by the organization for five of the senior

leaders interviewed. P1 provided a copy of the company's performance assessment template supported by a presentation that explained the bonus sliding scale and compilation process. P3, P4, P5, and P6 indicated that their performance appraisal form included a rating for the value created by the individual, as a percentage, of overall performance. The value created P5 noted, represents "the variable pay of managers and executives that they effect or contribute to in their companies." Table 3 outlines the key terms associated with performance-related pay, as stated by the participants during the semistructured interviews. Amalgamated, the frequency these terms occurred amount to 2.89% of all the participant responses.

Table 3

References to Performance-Related Pay

Reference	Count	Weighted percentage
Performance	36	0.46
Sales	33	0.43
Value	26	0.33
Financial	19	0.24
Recognition	15	0.19
Remuneration	14	0.18
Dollars	11	0.14
Money	11	0.14
Incentives	10	0.13
Individual	10	0.13
Quarterly	9	0.12
Thousand	9	0.12
Results	8	0.10
Bonus	7	0.09
Program	7	0.09

All six senior leaders mentioned the need to have a robust performance-related pay program that supported any efforts by the business to retain middle management employees. P1 outlined that “we now have an enhanced bonus program that is tied to

performance and is based on multiple times base salary. So, the idea is on driving performance.” P2 and P4 recognized that compensation based on job performance is important to motivate managers. P3 echoed this sentiment, adding that “incentives are something that we use to attract people. Income earning with potential incentives are quite high.” P6 confirmed that the annual performance of the managers was tied to the company’s performance-related incentive program; a good performance meant up to a “three months bonus payout.” All the participants concluded that a performance-related incentive system supported their efforts to reduce turnover in their departments resulting in them working with the same middle managers during their tenure.

Although performance-related pay was a common strategy stated by all six participants for retaining middle managers, they all mentioned that basic pay was the least effective strategy for mitigating turnover at the middle management level. Middle managers, the participants noted, wanted to be treated as equals, rewarded for their contribution to the business and for their accomplishments. P1 stated,

When we make it your business to shake hands, and to help close deals, it’s really not complete, but when you’re a colleague and I’m helping you close a sale, then the manager starts to really shine, people are happy, and that’s when remuneration is no longer key.

P6 shared similar sentiments, adding

Pay is very short-lived. If people are being rewarded and they’re not being developed, they start to become bad performers. Even if they start complaining or

even if they stay, you find yourself trying to figure how to get them out because you're paying them well, but they never deliver on the results.

P3 emphasized that remuneration was not a sustainable strategy. P2 also noted that,

There is no amount of money I can pay to keep a person in my company. If they are stressed out and just don't want to be here, eventually the person steps back and makes the decision to go elsewhere for a lower salary, but where they are happier.

Three participants, namely, P4, P5, and P6, pointed to the need to have a more comprehensive approach to compensation as a retention strategy. Mustafa and Ali (2019) noted that both monetary and non-monetary incentives were required to increase autonomous motivation and to promote employee retention. All three participants emphasized the need to have middle managers buy-in to the vision of the company and to see that they are contributing to the success of the company. P4 noted that believing in a shared vision allowed individuals to feel accomplished beyond what salary they earned. P5 explained that obtaining buy-in to the vision of the company and how their work impacts the achievement of that vision "is what keeps them here." P6 noted that where managers did not believe in the goal or the vision of the organization, these managers will either leave or "you push them out for not allowing them to see that they are a key player."

Senior leaders are required to understand how middle managers are motivated to perform. Performance-related pay aligns with the core concept of the situational leadership conceptual framework, which notes that through the leadership approaches of

directing and coaching, leaders motivate their employees to work towards achieving the desired results differently. Cote (2017) advocated that leaders who apply a situational leadership approach, focuses on motivating and influencing their followers to achieve the intended outcome. Understanding that organizational and job-related characteristics motivate individuals differently, improves the leader-follower dyadic relationship and increases the job performance of the follower.

Situational leadership influences worker motivation and enhances employee performance (Reza, Rofiaty, & Djazuli, 2018; Selviasari, 2019). Worker motivation, as stated by Reza et al. (2018), is the process of energizing, generating, nurturing, and directing employee outcomes. Ultimately, Selviasari (2019) concluded that situational leadership styles, as well as compensation, impacted employee motivation and job performance. Performance-related pay is one form of motivation that senior leaders in the automotive industry in Trinidad apply as a retention strategy for middle management employees.

Theme 3: Career Growth and Development

Career growth and development was a theme derived from the participant responses and documentation reviewed as a fundamental strategy for reducing middle management turnover. As depicted in Figure 2, all six participants mentioned the importance of providing opportunities for career growth and development to middle managers within their companies.

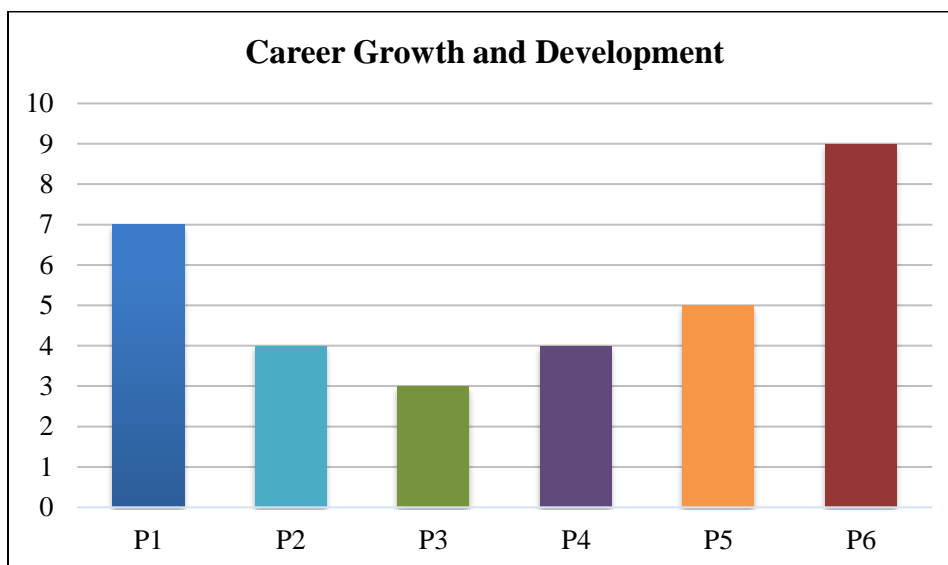


Figure 2. Participant responses to theme 3.

All participants in the study echoed the importance of providing career growth and development opportunities as an effective strategy for management retention. The importance placed on career development within an organization outweighs the value of the compensation received by employees (Ahmad, Khan, & Haque, 2020). P5 agreed, noting that “there is good training and great opportunities for career development, the fact that so many of them stayed tells me that it’s not just pay.” Mustafa and Ali (2019) suggested that employees perceive opportunities for development, positively, and are more inclined to stay. P2 agreed, stating that “the moment you invest in training people, the more they want to stay.” Ahmad et al. (2020) suggested that companies which invest in employees’ development, benefit from higher employee retention, and job satisfaction. P1 noted that development was the “most effective strategy for retaining managers” at the organization.

Sheraz, Batool, and Adnan (2019), in a study that analyzed the impact of career development on employee retention and job satisfaction, suggested that through career development programs, employees can improve execution, increase opportunities for advancement, and enhance effectiveness and innovativeness. P3 underscored the impact of development on work effectiveness stating,

In the last three years, we have placed a strong and focused approach on training middle management and getting them involved, not just training for their roles but training to improve their effectiveness as managers and delivering results through their reports.

By providing career growth and development opportunities, leaders can retain their key talent. P6 asserted that a focus on providing opportunities for advancement increases the commitment of talented employees. DeMotta, Gonzales, and Lawson (2019) reported that development strategies were critical to leaders in retaining their top employees. Consequently, the lack of continuous development can diminish a firm's strategy for retaining critical skills. As suggested by P4,

Good people who are in middle management want to grow, and they have ambitions. There's only so long where they'll say, 'I don't care once I get the money.' They start with that, but then they eventually want the title, they want the recognition, they want to advance and grow with the company. Usually, if they see that the organization is providing a good future for them, they stay.

All of the participants were able to provide documentation related to the theme of career growth and development. Within two of the companies, approved corporate

training plans for the years 2017 to 2019 were shared. In one case, it was noted that while the budget decreased from US\$220.6k to US\$196.7k for the period reviewed, the amount attributed to leadership development increased by 23%, from US\$69k to US\$84.6k. P1 emphasized that although “budgetary constraints impacted the total allocation for training, the focus on leadership development was still paramount.”

P2 allowed permission to review the company’s executive and management succession plan, which identified possible successors, their readiness levels, and development gaps. Also, I was shown a copy of the organization’s competency-based matrix, which highlighted the competencies required for each management level, the definition of the competency, and the score attributed to each competency based on the level of management. Both documents, P2 noted, were used during the talent discussions to assess the readiness levels of managers and to determine their placement on a nine-box leadership assessment tool. Three participants-P3, P4, and P5-pointed to the annual performance appraisal forms, which identified a section for assessors to document the development plan for the individual for the ensuing assessment year. Included in the appraisal form was also a section which captured the employee’s career interests, this P5 mentioned was used to gauge the career development and succession plans for the middle managers. The review of these documents supported methodological triangulation.

The conceptual framework for this study supported the findings as shared by the participants. According to Daniëls, Hondeghem, and Dochy (2019), the situational leadership framework implies that to be effective in different situations, leaders should acknowledge opportunities to improve employees’ skills, abilities, and self-assurance.

The development level of a follower is a crucial determinant of the leadership approach required, as well as the effectiveness of the leader's style. Furthermore, Thompson and Glasø (2018) summarized that as employees' competence increases, the need for a directive leadership approach reduces. Conversely, as competence decreases, the need to support the individual increases, therefore, to be effective, a leader must align their leadership style based on the follower's knowledge of the task, skills acquired through training and development opportunities, confidence, and motivation.

Theme 4: Person-Job Alignment

All the participants mentioned the importance of having a robust recruitment strategy focused on identifying the best employee for the job as being a crucial element for mitigating turnover. Johennesse and Chou (2017) acknowledged that the recruitment process is fundamental to retaining capable employees. As such, the researchers noted, leaders must be certain of the suitability of the candidate to perform the job function. Mamun and Hasan (2017) added that a significant percentage of turnover is due to mistakes made during the recruitment process. Therefore, organizational leaders must implement measures that improve the effectiveness of selecting and evaluating potential joiners. Moreover, Choi, Tran, and Kang (2017) inferred that leaders should manage employees' assessment of person-job fit from the recruitment and selection process to the socialization phase to avoid ineffective outcomes. Nguyen, Le, Trinh, and Do (2019) supported this view, noting that the recruitment process is vital to ensuring a person-job fit. Table 4 outlines the key terms associated with person-job alignment, as mentioned by

the participants during the interview phase. Accumulatively, the frequent use of these terms represented 4.73% of all the participant responses.

Table 4

References to Person-Job Alignment

Reference	Frequency	Weighted percentage	Similar words
Strategy	49	0.64	strategies
Leader	45	0.58	leaders, leadership
Effective	42	0.54	effectiveness
Decision	34	0.44	decide, decisions
Service	30	0.39	-
Industry	26	0.33	-
Interview	24	0.31	interviews
Experience	21	0.27	-
Process	21	0.27	-
Structure	16	0.21	structured
Culture	14	0.18	-
Recruitment	13	0.17	-
Skills	11	0.14	-
Individual	10	0.13	-
System	10	0.13	-

The participants emphasized the relevance of having a structured and competency-based recruitment and selection process to identify the right candidate for the job. P2 advised that “it’s very important that before you hire somebody, you have the right recruitment and selection policies, procedures, and processes that support the business.” P1 narrated the use of panel interviews to recruit management level employees so that at the end of the process, “there is a more comprehensive assessment of which candidate is the best fit for the job.” The ability for the new hire to fit into the organizational culture is also essential. According to Jin, McDonald, and Park (2018), understanding the alignment between the person-organization fit and turnover is important. Aligning the individual’s values with the values of the organization reduces the propensity that the employee will exit the organization. P4 cautioned that,

Finding the right person starts from the recruitment and selection process because we are very cautious when we bring people into the team. We believe we would have established a particular culture, and it’s very easy for one bad addition to change the entire culture.

P5 subscribed to the view that the recruitment process must focus on finding the right fit for the organization. P5 stated,

...you don’t hire someone simply because they look great on paper, somebody could do exceptionally well in the interview setting but, you realise they will not fit in well with our culture, then you are setting yourself up for failure.

Paisey and Paisey (2018) signalled that poor recruitment and selection decisions could result in increased costs to the firm, increased employee turnover, and lowering the

morale of the current workforce. As such, business leaders must invest considerable effort and cost to acquiring and selecting the right individuals for their organizations (Shaheen, Azam, Soma, & Kumar, 2019). To find the right person-job fit, some participants indicated that they contract recruitment agencies to fill vacancies at the management level. P4 highlighted the use of alternate recruitment strategies to support their ability to obtain talent from a broader cross-section of the industry. P4 added that,

Due to the limited talent pool within the automotive sector, in the next few years, company owners may have no choice but to start looking outside of the sector or the country for certain positions, because they may no longer exist here in Trinidad.

P3 said that it is critical to find the right skills set, and this is not always available within the automotive sales industry. In this regard, P3 stated,

I often find that organizations in their recruitment and retention process tend to look for people from within the same industry, and I don't necessarily agree with that approach. From my own experience, I recruit based on the skills I require. Technical training is not the only thing you look for, mentality and work ethic tend to differ across industries. A sales manager at a multi-national retail sales company can and should be successful at selling new vehicles.

Participants shared documents to support their responses including templates of competency-based interview questionnaires. Additionally, a redacted summary report of a psychometric assessment for the role of service manager was shared by one participant as evidence of the steps taken to determine the right candidate is selected based on the

culture of the organization and the requirements of the job. Person-job alignment was a crucial theme shared by all the participants for improving the tendency for middle managers to have a meaningful career aligned to their aspirations. Consequently, person-job alignment mitigates turnover at the middle management level.

The theme of person-job alignment aligns with the conceptual framework of this study. Choi et al. (2017) and Nguyen et al. (2019) found that subordinates who have supportive leaders can experience higher person-job fit, therefore resulting in positive job outcomes such as reduced turnover intentions. Kundu and Lata (2017) acknowledged that perceived supportive supervision and a positive work environment enable employee job satisfaction and positively influence employee retention. A supportive work environment, Kundu and Lata noted enhances affective commitment and strengthens employees' job interest and productivity. Abdirahman et al. (2018) concurred, acknowledging that employees with higher levels of commitment are motivated to increase their job performance and execution.

Having a supporting leader can improve job performance. According to Mwaisaka, K'Aol, and Ouma (2019), with enhanced job performance, the level of job satisfaction can reduce turnover intentions and accordingly increase employee job commitment. The SLII model requires the leader to apply varying amounts of supportive behavior aligned to the task and readiness of the subordinate, which in turn improves employee job satisfaction and reduces employee intentions to quit (Oc, 2018). Covella, McCarthy, Kaifi, and Cocoran (2017) concluded that supportive leadership and person-job fit influenced turnover intentions, positively, and increased employee engagement.

Applications to Professional Practice

The results of this study may provide leaders with the tools and knowledge needed to mitigate turnover at the middle management level. The participants identified elements that positively mitigate middle management turnover, including coaching, performance-related pay, career growth and development, and recruitment based on person-job alignment. By applying varying leadership styles that support the differing situational context, development level, and readiness of subordinates, employee organizational commitment increased, and their turnover intentions reduced. These factors can support firm sustainability. Deshwal and Ashraf Ali (2020) noted, that the effectiveness of a leader, premised on their ability to apply the most appropriate leadership style, is paramount to the success of an organization. Based on the results of this study, the lack of supportive and directive leadership, a lack of career advancement opportunities, the absence of development programs, a lack of financial recognition, and a lack of alignment between the person and the job, can reduce organizational profitability and sustainability. Consequently, appropriate leadership style is vital to ensuring that employees are motivated to perform and enthused to assume personal ownership for the firm's performance (Mohamed & Bett, 2018; Trevisol, Bencke, Padilha, & Roman, 2019).

The findings of this study elucidate strategies that can be applied to the professional practice of leaders in the automotive industry, as well as any other industry where organizational leaders are seeking approaches to reducing high employee turnover at their firm. Each of the strategies highlighted may assist leaders to successfully reduce

turnover at the middle management level within their organization. Providing leadership support through coaching enables an environment of success for middle managers, consequently enhancing job commitment. Developing a robust performance-related pay system that recognizes and rewards middle managers for their contribution enhances job satisfaction. Understanding the importance of career growth and development for middle managers is paramount to creating opportunities for progression and retention. Focusing the firm's recruitment strategy on aligning the right person for the job increases the level of job performance and job satisfaction, consequently increasing employee loyalty and commitment.

Implications for Social Change

The results of this study may provide leaders with the tools and knowledge needed to mitigate turnover at the middle management level. By focusing on the job and organizational factors that motivate middle management employees, senior leaders can positively improve the livelihood of their middle managers and, by extension, the families of these middle managers through career advancement opportunities and financial recognition for their contribution to the firm's profitability. Additionally, through reduced turnover, business leaders can increase their firm's sustainability and therefore nullify business failure (Aliyu & Nyadzayo, 2018; Qureshi, 2019). Increased sustainability may result in job security for the firm's employees therein positively influencing the livelihood of these employees, as well as job creation for individuals within the communities the companies operate, which consequently can result in favorable economic and social impacts on the families within these communities.

Furthermore, based on the firm's long-term profitability, the implication for social change can include the commitment of business leaders to enhance their corporate social brand visibility through increased funding to support social programs and related activities. Asmeri, Alvionita, and Gunardi (2017) found that sustained profitability gives leaders the confidence to create positive social value through corporate social responsibility. Mahapatra (2019) concurred, adding that positive social change can result from increased corporate sponsorship of social activities and infrastructural development. Consequently, the results of my study could improve the livelihood of community members as a result of increased corporate social responsibility initiatives by senior leaders.

Recommendations for Action

Business leaders can use identified strategies in this study to reduce turnover at the middle management level within their organizations. Based on the results of my research and from the insights gleaned from the academic literature review, the recommendations for action are for business leaders considering implementing retention strategies aimed at mitigating turnover at the management level. Following the themes of (a) coaching, (b) performance-related pay, (c) career growth and development, and (d) person-job alignment, I recommend the following:

1. Coaching should form an integral element of leadership and management development initiatives for business leaders. Consequently, human resource professionals should ensure that the firm's corporate training plans

incorporate coaching as a development initiative for managers and leaders in their companies.

2. Managers should be encouraged to conduct frequent one-on-one coaching sessions with managers to keep them engaged, motivated, and focused on the ultimate goals and objectives of the business.
3. Leaders should develop robust management compensation frameworks that support the selection of the right fit for the job and recognize and reward the contributions made by management level employees to organizational sustainability.
4. Human resource professionals should focus resources on talent management and succession planning for middle management employees, as well as top talent seeking to assume management level roles.
5. Business leaders should conduct frequent performance assessment conversations with their subordinates focused on aligning job performance with leadership support. Accordingly, leaders can adjust their leadership style based on the performance and adaptability of their direct reports.
6. Leaders should spend time developing competency-based interview assessments to identify the best person for the job. Such competency-based interviews should determine technical and behavioral job fit, as well as culture-organization fit.

7. Management and human resource professionals seeking to fill management level vacancies should extend their firm's recruitment strategy beyond their specific industry to find the most suitable candidate for the role.

Other business leaders in various industries and sectors who are striving to reduce the turnover rates in their companies may find value in these recommendations.

Therefore, I plan to share the findings of this study through various leadership forums, such as leadership conferences and educational workshops focused on improving leadership approaches to managing employees at all management levels. Additionally, I would aim to disseminate the results through business journals and scholarly publications, therein supporting current and future academic researchers.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the leadership strategies that automotive leaders used to mitigate middle management turnover.

Although the results of this study expanded my knowledge related to management turnover, the findings of the study provide support for further research to be conducted.

The study had four limitations that are worth expounding:

1. The use of situational leadership theory to explore strategies that automotive leaders may use to mitigate middle management turnover was the first limitation. Future researchers can address this limitation by including other leadership theories which could influence middle management turnover, differently. Consequently, the findings of the study could be more encompassing, and the results may be different.

2. The second limitation was the sample size of the current study. Six participants who demonstrated successful strategies that mitigated middle management turnover at their businesses were interviewed. I suggest that future researchers can address this limitation by increasing the sample size of the study, thereby improving the generalizability of the results to other settings. The focus of the study on the automotive sales industry in the north-eastern region of Trinidad, also posed a limitation to the generalizability of the study. I recommend that future researchers use a different geographic location also to improve the application of the results of the study to other locations and settings.
3. Another limitation of this research was the hierarchical level of the study participants. The participant was required to be a senior leader with more than five years of senior leadership experience and with at least one middle-manager reporting to them. Based on the senior executive roles of the participants, I was challenged to establish contact with these leaders, which resulted in unnecessary delays in collecting data. I recommend that future researchers could include managers at all levels and with less leadership experience and not only experienced senior leaders to alleviate this limitation. As such, time attributed to collecting data could be significantly reduced, and the focus placed on analyzing the data and concluding the study. Additionally, the results of the study may be beneficial for managers at all levels to understand how to reduce employee turnover overall.

4. A fourth limitation was the use of two data collection methods, namely interviews and documentation. Future researchers can address this limitation by using supplemented data collection methods. In addition to face-to-face semistructured interviews, which I used in this study, as well as documentation, future researchers can consider the use of journaling, direct observation, focus groups, and field notes to enhance the data collection phase of their study.

Reflections

Obtaining my doctoral-level study was always a personal goal. At the onset of this journey, I underestimated the mental focus and level of dedication and personal sacrifice it would take to remain focused and to complete. I have grown throughout the journey, I have improved my writing and research ability, as well as my critical thinking skill as a researcher. I aimed to understand the leadership-follower dyadic better, but I had no preconceived notion about the results of this study. The DBA doctoral study process has allowed me to understand the significance of comprehensive research in understanding strategies that improve leadership effectiveness and management retention. I focused my efforts on ensuring that my personal biases did not impede the results of this study and used the interview protocol to reduce these biases. I can now appreciate the need to apply different approaches in managing teams towards achieving one outcome.

The rigorous process instituted by Walden University also served to bolster the credibility of this study with the participants. The requirement of the Letter of Cooperation and the IRB process provided a platform for me to obtain agreement to meet

with senior executives and to acquire unencumbered insights into strategies that these leaders used to successfully mitigate turnover in the organizations. I am proud to have made the decision to begin this journey with Walden University. Additionally, having completed this process, I have reflected on my own experiences with different leadership styles. Based on the results of my study, to be effective, leaders must apply different approaches to various members of their teams to harness the true potential of each individual and to keep them motivated and engaged. Consequently, the results of this study have highlighted the importance of there being no one approach to effective leadership.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the leadership strategies that automotive leaders used to mitigate middle management turnover. I conducted semistructured interviews with six senior leaders within the automotive industry in the north-eastern region of Trinidad. I reviewed documentation to methodologically triangulate the data collected to enhance the validity of my study findings. Data saturation was obtained, member checking was performed, and NVivo 12 software was used to analyze the data collected. I identified four themes based on the data analysis conducted, namely, (a) coaching, (b) performance-related pay, (c) career growth and development, and (d) person-job alignment. Each theme aligned with the conceptual framework of situational leadership and with current literature.

The results of this study confirmed that senior leaders used specific strategies to successfully mitigate turnover at the middle-management level in their organization.

Without strategies to arrest high turnover rates, particularly, at the management levels, business leaders could face considerable costs associated with replacement recruitment efforts, diminished market share, reduced profitability, and threatened long-term sustainability. Failure to sustain long term business operations can have a significant negative impact on communities in which these firms operate, therefore, limiting opportunities for business leaders to contribute towards meaningful and positive social impact.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What leadership strategies have you used to mitigate middle management turnover?
2. Based on your experiences, what factors influenced staff turnover at the middle management level?
3. How have you assessed the effectiveness of your strategies for mitigating middle management turnover at your company?
4. Of the strategies applied to mitigate middle management turnover, which strategy, if any, do you believe was most effective?
5. What strategy has been the least effective in mitigating middle management turnover?
6. What other information can you add that will provide a deeper understanding of what strategies are successful for reducing middle management turnover?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Interview: “What leadership strategies do automotive leaders use to mitigate middle management turnover?”

- A. I will meet with the participant at the agreed location and at the agreed time.
- B. I will commence the interview with introductions and appreciation for their time and participation.
- C. I will state the purpose of the study and the interview question.
- D. I will state that the interview will be recorded and that I will be taking notes during the process.
- E. I will remind the participant that the information that they provide will be confidential and will be kept secure for five years and destroyed personally by me at the end of the period.
- F. I will remind them of their option to withdraw from the study at any time during the process, including after the interview session.
- G. I will obtain their consent to proceed.
- H. During the interview, I will ask follow-up questions to obtain clarity and to gain greater insights into the topic, as well as take note of any non-verbal cues.
- I. Following the conclusion of the interview session, I will thank the participant for their time and their participation.

- J. Finally, I will inform the participant about the member checking process and the need to obtain secondary data for triangulation. I will obtain their approval to access the necessary company records.
- K. I will remind them of my commitment to share with them a summary of the findings of the study.