

2021

## Strategies for Increasing Information Technology Employee Work-Life Balance

Kimberly D. Seymour  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Kimberly D. Seymour

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## Review Committee

Dr. Matasha Murrelljones, Committee Chairperson, Doctor of Business Administration  
Faculty

Dr. Ify Diala, Committee Member, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Alexandre Lazo, University Reviewer, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost  
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University  
2021

Abstract

Strategies for Increasing Information Technology Employee Work-Life Balance

by

Kimberly D. Seymour

MBA, American Military University, 2015

BS, Campbell University, 2006

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

June 2021

## Abstract

Small to medium enterprise (SME) information technology (IT) managers' lack of strategic planning initiatives in creating a work life balance environment has created personal and financial concerns for some employees in the United States. Managers must develop and implement strategies that increase profits and productivity as well as create work life balance. Grounded in Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies SME IT business managers used to develop and implement an employee work-life balance environment. The participants were three IT managers and two human resources business managers. Data were collected from semistructured interviews, publicly available company documentation, and business review documentation provided by three IT managers and two human resources business managers. Yin's five-step thematic analysis process was used to analyze data. Four themes emerged: (a) work-life balance, (b) communication, (c) flexibility, and (d) job satisfaction. Recommendations for business managers include implementing: (a) open forum discussions, (b) flex work/personal time, and (3) healthcare incentives. The implications for social change include the opportunity for those in the economy to experience increased hiring opportunities, less turnover, and fewer unemployment claims. Implementation of the strategies identified could lead to increased revenues that benefit the community and improve work-life balance. Reducing stress in employees' personal lives could also promote clearer communication and job satisfaction.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my grandmothers, Mildred C. Austin, Fannie Mae Pryor, and Gladys Brown; my parents, father Larry E. C. Brown-Austin and mother Margie Pryor; my husband, Brian K. Seymour; and my four children, in order of age not favorite, as I favor you all equally, Brian K. Seymour II, Stephanie D. Seymour, Brian D. Brown-Austin, and Brandon Harold Seymour, for being my greatest cheering section and for supporting me through all my late nights, gripes, complaints, and trials and tribulations. It has been a long hard fought battle, but I am here. I am saddened that not all of you are still here to see the end of this journey, but I know all of my grandmothers are looking down on me with pride. I want to thank my siblings also as they do not like being left out; we have endured many things, and I am happy that they are sharing this joy with me. Thank you to the almighty God above, for never ever letting me break.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Work-life balance (WLB) and employee retention in small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is currently understudied (Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2020). In particular, more research is needed to identify what strategies business leaders can implement to prevent voluntary employee turnover while increasing job satisfaction and higher profitability (Gallup, 2017). Preventing turnover of information technology (IT) workers is especially critical for SMEs, which have fewer resources in compared to larger companies (Azar, 2017). Some IT business managers have proactively focused on strategies to keep their skilled IT professionals employed and satisfied (Mohlala et al., 2012). Frederiksen (2017) highlighted the value of using data in the decision-making process from job satisfaction surveys. More research is necessary, however, to identify strategies that SME leaders can use to foster WLB and job satisfaction among IT workers.

### **Background of the Problem**

Although there is a wealth of information about WLB in large organizations (Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2020) there is minimal research on the topic in SMEs. This is despite SME business owners garnering millions of dollars in revenues yearly. Poor WLB is problematic because it might contribute to employee engagement and productivity issues. Prior research has shown that disengaged employees lack the desire to assist management with getting their job done, due to work-life conflict and a failed employee-employer relationship (Deery, M., & Jago, L., 2015). These issues may result

in employee turnover. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017), 25 million U.S. workers quit their jobs in 2016.

Strategies to promote WLB, job satisfaction, and retention are pivotal in the IT sector. The projected number of computer and IT occupations is projected to increase 13% between 2016 and 2026, far surpassing most industries (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). Managers' ability to retain skilled employees is key to lessening turnover (Erat et al., 2017). The need for strategies to promote employee retention and WLB is especially critical for SMEs (Rothausen et al., 2017). Most of these businesses cannot overcome the loss of such highly skilled individuals and remain relevant in a business world that thrives on profitability (Azar, 2017). For these reasons, more research is needed to identify strategies that business leaders can implement to prevent voluntary employee turnover among IT workers while increasing job satisfaction and higher profitability (Dwivedi et al., 2015; Gallup, 2017). Business leaders have found higher productivity and profitability in employees when they developed strategies to retain skilled IT professionals (Kortmann et al., 2014). According to Al-Emadi et al. (2015), employers can add a mentoring program as a method of retention and strategic planning. Not all managers may know how to develop and implement an employee environment with WLB, however.

### **Problem Statement**

A lack of flexible work time and flexible work locations can lessen employees' perceptions of WLB and lead to stress and turnover that affects workers' efficiency (Ridić et al., 2016). Azar (2017) noted that flexible work arrangements and reduced workforce

costs between 2005 and 2016 by approximately 13% and that flexibility in staff hours and locations has the potential to save an additional 3% to 7% in further workforce costs. The general business problem was that some managers lacked strategies to develop and implement an employee WLB environment. The specific business problem was that some IT managers of SMEs lacked strategies to create and implement an employee work-life balance environment.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies SME IT business managers used to develop and implement an employee WLB environment. The population in this study comprised five IT business managers in five SMEs located in the Southeastern United States who developed flexible work opportunities, who reduced turnover and improved WLB and retention of skilled employees. The implications for positive social change are that the findings could help local IT managers improve work and life balance. These actions can then provide a collaborative work environment, which could lead to reduced turnover that is beneficial to the local economy through a reduction in job losses and fewer unemployment claims.

### **Nature of the Study**

The three research methods most popular among researchers are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. The qualitative method entails interpretive philosophy, as well as subjective and socially constructed meanings (Saunders et al., 2015). Researchers use the qualitative research method to explore what has occurred and is occurring by asking open-ended questions. I chose the qualitative method to explore



flexible work options and strategic planning initiatives that local business managers used to implement WLB. Several authors have attributed different strategies as contributing factors that managers use to reduce stress and improve WLB. These strategies include personal development, training, and support (Gao et al., 2017; Rahman, 2014, Yang et al., 2016; Yim et al., 2017).

I used a qualitative approach, in which I asked participants open-ended questions. The questions addressed the importance of a feasible environment in which the employee and employer both achieve satisfaction. The use of the quantitative method is effective for the statistical examination of specific variables to test hypotheses (Saunders et al., 2015). According to Park and Park (2016), researchers use the quantitative method to examine the relationships in data and observations. Researchers use a mixed-methods approach when they seek a holistic approach and combine qualitative and quantitative research methods (Makrakis & Kostoulas-Makrakis, 2016). I did not test any hypotheses or examine any relationship between variables. As a result, I did not use the quantitative or mixed-method approaches. Although Makrakis and Kostoulas-Makrakis, (2016) described how researchers could minimize weaknesses by combining qualitative and quantitative research, to gain in-depth insight on the study phenomenon, I chose to implement qualitative research.

The three common qualitative research designs are case study, ethnography, and phenomenology (Nazari, 2013). Researchers use ethnography to describe a phenomenon from a cultural context. Phenomenology researchers explore the meanings of lived experiences of participants regarding a phenomenon of interest (Lewis, 2015).

Researchers use the case study design to explore individuals or organizations through relationships or their environment (Yin, 2018). I used the case study design because I wanted to interview and observe the participants in their work environment and explore the participants' perceptions regarding a WLB environment. Lee and Sirgy (2018) argued that researchers currently used outcome-based measures as indicators of WLB; however, a more suitable action is to accurately show how personal strategies help foster WLB. IT business managers can assist employees by implementing strategies that participants can apply to achieve overall life satisfaction (Lee & Sirgy, 2018).

### **Research Question**

What strategies do IT business managers of SMEs develop and implement to improve WLB?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What are some strategies you used to improve WLB for your employees?
2. How did you assess the effectiveness of the WLB strategies once implemented?
3. What key challenges did you encounter deploying these WLB strategies in your department?
4. How did you address these key challenges?
5. How did you assess the effectiveness of strategies implemented for challenges?
6. What additional strategies do you wish to share regarding strategies you used to increase WLB for your employees?

## Conceptual Framework

I chose the motivation-hygiene theory, created by Herzberg et al. in 1959, to depict key concepts of motivator and hygiene factors that participants experience in their workplace. These two factors represent the foundation of Herzberg's theory (Ogunnaiké et al., 2017). Understanding motivation, as it applies to employee satisfaction and motivation in work environments, was a crucial aspect that I explored in this study. Herzberg's theory links the relationship between rewards and motivation and assists in identifying areas that affect WLB. Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory, which is referred to as the two-factors theory, addresses several characteristics that relate to job satisfaction and dissatisfaction, which are an intricate part of WLB and organizational efficiency. Aynur et al. (2015) suggested that motivation and labor productivity are essential factors in WLB, which aligns with Herzberg's motivation theory. Herzberg's theory offers a two-dimensional paradigm of factors that can influence peoples' attitudes towards work (Alshmemri et al., 2017). Understanding issues such as company policies, job security, and working conditions that influence workers' attitude was essential to this study.

In conducting the study, I also addressed Braun and Peus's (2018) call for research on business leaders' efforts to promote employees' well-being. I identified and explored strategies that leaders could use to improve turnover rates among skilled IT professionals. Kanfer et al. (2017) stated that there were differences between work goals and performance that may influence turnover. I used the motivation-hygiene theory to explore the intrinsic and extrinsic values of employees to gauge WLB and satisfaction in

their organization. The findings of this study could extend the local business value proposition on areas of concern that affect WLB and flexible work arrangements.

According to Stamolampros et al. (2019), although employee satisfaction is an essential aspect of WLB, career progression is critical for lessening employee turnover.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Employee engagement:* Employee engagement is a positive work-related commitment that an individual commits to their job (Albrecht et al., 2015). Employee engagement can also result in employees expending more effort and performing their job well and to the best of their abilities, promoting self-growth (Alshmemri et al., 2017).

*Flexible work:* Workplace programs some employers offer to employees that allow employees to work from alternative locations or maintain a flexible schedule (Basit, 2017). Flexible work may promote efficiency and further workers' desire to perform well (Basit, 2017).

*Hygiene factors:* Company policies and administrative procedures, as well as relationships built with supervisors, are all considered hygiene factors (Herzberg et al., 1959). Working conditions and salaries are factors that affect hygiene and the way employees do their job (Herzberg et al., 1959).

*Motivators:* Business managers may establish trust in employees through the use of motivators such as worker achievement, recognition of work, advancement, and the possibility of growth, as well as confidence (Latif, 2018).

*Organizational efficiency:* Intrinsic and extrinsic motivators assist in workers' organizational effectiveness due to some workers' degree of employee involvement and commitment to corporate decisions (Holland et al., 2017).

*Worker efficiency:* Worker efficiency from a manager's perspective can affect the amount of work an individual can handle in a specified amount of time and how well work processes function in day-to-day activities (Viotti et al., n.d.).

*Work-life balance (WLB):* Work-life balance, or work-family balance, refers to the mediated relationship between employees' organizational commitment and job satisfaction, or the balance that some employees seek in work and nonwork activities (Peng, 2018).

*Burnout:* Workers experience differing levels of fatigue and excessive stress levels when they must carry extreme workloads or demands to complete tasks in a specified amount of time. Actions such as these may lead to emotional anxiety or emotional exhaustion, which, according to Flynn and Ironside (2018), can lead to burnout.

## **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

### **Assumptions**

In the context of research, an assumption refers to a researcher's view that their claims are valid without verification (Gardner & Johnson, 2015). The first assumption I had was that I would articulate the goal of my research project and the business managers participants would readily want to participate. The second assumption was that business managers would understand what I wanted to explore and would respond to my questions

on WLB and strategies used in the organization openly and honestly. The third assumption was that interviews would yield unbiased feedback on current business practices and on potential plans to create a WLB environment. I assumed the participant responses were unbiased and forthcoming without verification. I also assumed that participants would commit dedicated time for a face-to-face interview in their work environment.

### **Limitations**

Limitations refer to potential weaknesses that a researcher encounters that are out of the researcher's control (Helmich et al., 2015). This study was a multiple qualitative case study limited to five IT business managers working at five SMEs located in the Southeastern United States. Limitations from me which may slow the progress of attained credible research data, begun with any potential bias I brought to the research, due to being the primary data source. Additional limitations included any time restraints of participants to address my research questions and provide credible data for qualitative analysis. IT business managers may also change from location and shift, which could have affected the participant pool during the time of the study.

### **Delimitations**

Researchers set specific boundaries and limits on what is included in a study (Snelson, 2016). Delimitations in this study included the number and type of participants and their geographical location. The scope of the research centered on SMEs in the Southeastern United States, with specific focus on the IT industry. The study participants included a limited set of five IT business managers. The interview questions were

explicitly tailored to managers and their strategies for WLB, with no employees' perspectives analyzed for contrast or comparison. The study was limited to one geographical location, which may hinder the identification of other suggestions and successful strategies.

### **Significance of the Study**

Some IT business managers lack strategies for fostering WLB that can result in employee turnover. The IT field has had significant growth over the years because of technological advances. Schlegel (2017) pointed out, however, that those working in remote work environments may find it difficult to separate work life from homelife. Retaining skilled talent is necessary for organizational leaders to attain and maintain a competitive advantage in a global market (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). According to Barber et al. (2016), prior research on a healthy workplace has resulted in employers associating better job performance, health, safety, and job satisfaction, as well as organizational commitment, with employees who experience WLB. Results from this study could offer strategies that local business managers and leaders could use to reduce voluntary employee turnover among IT professionals.

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

The findings of this study could provide local IT business managers with alternative options to retain employees and prevent turnover, by introducing job flexibility as a viable solution that business managers can use to keep skilled IT professionals. The study findings could also help local IT managers explore strategies that could contribute to WLB and employee retention. The study could contribute to local

business' performance by providing strategic alternatives that support organizational capacity and WLB. An improved understanding of strategies to promote WLB could help with retention.

The potential to change work schedules and work locations are areas of flexibility that can lead to local managers' implementation of new best practices, which can lead to strategic methods that may contribute to actual business practice. There are several flexible work arrangements available to employees; two popular options are telecommuting and teleworking. According to Child and Hsieh (2014, p. 605), SME's knowledge domain influences technology use and network attachment. It is also important to have a mix of business/external and personal/internal links (Child et al., 2017). According to De Menezes and Kelliher (2017), employers may benefit from flexible work arrangements, due to the physical and psychological relief such arrangements offer workers. Reducing voluntary employee turnover while increasing organizational competitive advantages and increasing profits both contribute to effective business practice (McMurrian & Matulich, 2016).

### **Implications for Social Change**

Local IT business managers' use of a decisive plan to support flexible work schedules or locations for employees could also have implications for positive social change. Improved WLB for employees could lead to better family relationships, better manager-employee relationships because of reduced stress, prevention of high turnover, and improved organizational performance. Reducing unemployment may support the build stronger family ties with reduced stress and burnout of workers and have a positive



effect on well-being and work-family support (Goh et al., 2015). The results of this study may benefit managers, organizations, and communities due to business managers' dependency on technically qualified employees and network links to maintain growth and sustainability (Salavisa et al., 2012).

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

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies IT managers used to create a WLB environment. I examined strategies business managers used to reduce turnover among skilled IT professionals within the organization. This review includes literature that I collected regarding strategies that IT business managers may apply to create WLB. The literature addresses the central research question, which centers on the strategies that business managers can use to attain WLB for and reduce turnover of skilled IT professionals. I reviewed several sources to achieve credible information applicable to the research question. To address the conceptual framework of the study, I reviewed past researchers' theories and findings, which supported and contrasted with Herzberg's theory. The two theories I considered are Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Vroom's expectancy theory. I discuss each theory in the review of academic and professional literature.

I searched multiple databases to find relevant peer-reviewed journal articles and books. Other sources included IT websites and company policies. Walden University Library provided access to Academic Search Complete/Premier, EBSCO Complete, ProQuest Central, SAGE Premier, ScienceDirect, and Thoreau Multi-Database Search. I also used Google Scholar and included in my search criteria, several key terms. Terms

that relate to scholarly data on my research topic included *work-life balance*, *job satisfaction*, *motivation-hygiene theory*, *IT project management*, *voluntary employee turnover*, and *work environment*.

Most (85%) of the sources yielded by the search were peer reviewed and published within 5 years of my anticipated graduation date, covering 2015-2019. I used multiple sources to ensure rigor, credibility, and validity, as I focused on closing the gaps within the literature on effective strategies for creating a WLB and reducing voluntary employee turnover. Of the 251 sources that I referenced, 205 were recent peer-reviewed research articles and published documents from 2014 to 2019 (see Table 1). I also reviewed seminal books, relevant governmental and company websites published within 5 years of 2020, and company data provided by IT business managers.

**Table 1***Summary of Sources Used in the Literature Review*

Reference type	Count	Percentage
Peer-reviewed journals within 5 years of 2020	145	85
Peer-reviewed journals more than 5 years of 2020	46	17
Non-peer-reviewed journals within 5 years of 2020	12	7.5
Non-peer-reviewed journals more than 5 years of 2020	10	6.2
Dissertations within 5 years of 2020	0	0
Dissertations more than 5 years of 2020	0	0
Books within 5 years of 2020	14	0
Books more than 5 years of 2020	17	7.5
Government web sources	7	0
Other websites	0	0
Total	251	100.00

The literature review includes a detailed discussion of WLB, motivation-hygiene theory, job satisfaction, dissatisfaction, communication, and leadership skills attributed to the phenomenon. Researchers are responsible for comparing numerous sources on subject materials to ensure a thorough analysis of existing literature. The objective is to identify emerging themes that may support each aspect of the research topic. I have organized the literature review by theme. Themes include WLB, employee satisfaction, dissatisfaction, motivation, communication, voluntary employee turnover, work-life conflict, Herzberg motivation-hygiene theory, Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, and Vroom's expectancy motivation theory.

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies IT business managers used to create a WLB environment and reduce voluntary employee turnover. The results of the study could help some IT business managers to remove

barriers that may contribute to a lack of WLB, which may potentially lead to a reduction in voluntary employee turnover. Employers have often looked at ways to increase overall efficiency and organizational performance (Goh et al., 2015). According to Kraemer et al. (2016), employers realize employee turnover when there is a lack of WLB.

### **Herzberg Motivation-Hygiene Theory**

This review includes several subsections that highlight Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory (also known as Herzberg's two-factor theory), which centers on how leaders promote employees' job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction. In Herzberg et al. (1959), readers find helpful information on the reasoning and motivation of employees to buy into their company's organizational success. Herzberg discussed job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction and how these things may influence voluntary employee turnover.

Herzberg et al. (1959) interviewed 200 engineers to find out what factors' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their employer or employment. Herzberg et al. (1959) revealed some strategies and techniques that business managers may use to increase productivity and efficiency in employees' job performance. Flexible work arrangements are a nonmonetary strategy that employers can use to help with retention (Van Yperen et al., 2016).

Herzberg et al. (1959) also distinguishes between positive job attitudes and factors that lead to employees' negative job attitudes. Herzberg's theory is still relevant today because it helps researchers to distinguish between job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Herzberg (1966) provided several options to explore voluntary employee turnover and possible strategies managers can implement for WLB. Herzberg identified several factors

that contribute to employee satisfaction (Band et al., 2016). Herzberg found that there were differences between those factors that caused employee satisfaction and those that caused workers dissatisfaction (Band et al., 2016; Herzberg, 1966, 2003). It is essential to account for workers' satisfaction and dissatisfaction with management (Herzberg et al., 1959).

I used Herzberg's two-factor theory as the conceptual framework of my study. Through Herzberg's theory, I explored what strategies IT business managers implemented to reduce employee turnover while creating an equitable WLB environment. According to Band et al. (2016), high motivation is essential to workers. When motivation is high and hygiene is low, employees may perform with fewer complaints. When work conditions or the environment is reduced and salaries are low, the propensity to stay is not likely (Band et al., 2016). Band et al. stated that low hygiene and motivation can negatively affect an organization.

Herzberg et al. (1959) categorized his two-factor theory into two distinctive categories. The first set of factors are motivators that managers use to recognize employees' attributes, and which can lead to employees' job satisfaction, self-growth, and self-actualization. The second set of factors that Herzberg defined were hygiene factors. They are intrinsic to the work employees perform, which can be dissatisfying to the point that the employee leaves their organization (Hofaidhllaoui & Chhinzer, 2014). Researchers also attributed employee retention and satisfaction from supportive supervisors who assisted with workloads and work-family conflicts (Goh et al., 2015).

Herzberg (1966) addressed the difference between "kick in the pants" management and management through motivation. Herzberg explained that the first type of management only works for a limited time and is a hygiene factor from which managers should only expect short-term results. Employees may not feel motivated to perform out of loyalty or a desire; neither is there a sense of satisfaction in the work performed. Whereas, when managers provide motivators in employees, there is a sense of comfort in work performed and long-term self-motivation. Actions such as these can allow IT business managers time to focus on job enrichment and satisfaction, which may help with the retention of workers (Band et al., 2016).

### ***Motivators***

Motivators include (a) employee sense of achievement, (b) recognition of performance (c) the work itself, (d) responsibility, and (e) advancement (Herzberg, 1966, 2003). According to Herzberg et al. (1959), motivation factors account for the positive job factors and sense of satisfaction that an employee feels in their work environment. When an employee experiences a sense of achievement, there may be both a sense of pride in their personal and professional well-being. Herzberg et al. related certain factors to positive attitudes and others to a negative attitude that employees developed towards work. Business managers can seek to understand effective methods that enhance productivity and profitability, as employees perform their duties and find a sense of achievement in the intrinsic factors of their job responsibilities (Herzberg et al., 1959).

Fostering motivation in employees is essential for business managers. Motivated employees who are enthusiastic about their jobs and engaged in work processes

internalize the values, ethics, and mission of the company as a personal and organizational commitment (Adyasha, 2013). Business managers implement many motivators to intrigue employees, enhance overall job performance, and ultimately create job satisfaction. Business managers provide motivational support through recognition of achievement, which can help increase employees' engagement in their work environment and ultimately increased their satisfaction (Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2015).

Business managers must refrain from activities that fail to motivate employees and lead to dissatisfied or disgruntled employees who may choose to leave. Reducing voluntary employee turnover is essential to maintaining an engaged employee.

Motivation can come from the work itself and the chance for advancement in a pleasant work environment (Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2015). Job advancement and recognition are motivating factors that business managers use in retention efforts and for achieved organizational goals and objectives (Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2015).

The motivation for business managers may come from the recognition that comes from understanding that employees are a definitive factor in support of the mission and vision of the organization and that everyone can achieve a happy work-environment (Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2015). Business managers in the IT field may find it challenging to identify new and creative ways to satisfy workers' interests; however, a pleasant work environment can maximize job satisfaction (Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2015). Management styles and leaders' overall knowledge, skills, and abilities can hamper or increase workers' total satisfaction, working conditions, and productivity (Chandrasekar, 2011).

According to Amzat et al. (2017), business leaders should strive for an understanding of what motivates and satisfies workers that involves policy related to employee well-being. Although Amzat et al. discussed the practical implications of teachers' well-being and overall satisfaction as motivators, the information is applicable across multiple industries. According to Lăzăroiu (2015), satisfaction can motivate workers and enhance work performance and growth. Amzat et al. also discussed the implications of workers' development of personal growth, which can assist in establishing their happiness and satisfaction.

Personal growth, according to Davidescu (2018), occurs when workers feel that management listens to their ideas, thoughts, and suggestions. It is also crucial that workers receive encouragement and training for their tasks. Internal motivators from those in authoritative positions can help some workers to advance in their occupations, and the intrinsic value of employees is likely to improve. Herzberg (1966) clearly defined motivators as real factors that contribute to the motivation that workers experience in their day-to-day work activities. Although Herzberg's hygiene-motivation theory was referenced in many articles and published works as a practical approach that managers can use to motivate employees, there are differing views as to the differences between motivators or hygiene factors. Researchers have discovered that some hygiene factors are also motivators. Lăzăroiu (2015), for instance, found that employees' work motivation and their attitudes toward work can have an immense effect on their performance. Managers should understand that it is not optimal for the organization or employee relations when there is no sense of employee-employer relationship (Lăzăroiu, 2015).



Managers and supervisors who engaged and cared for their workers, provided a sense of value and pride within their employees, and can supply emotional ambience in their workplace (Lăzăroiu, 2015). When connections are bridged, workers feel an attachment and are more engaged in their job (Peters, 2015).

### ***Communication***

Effective communication provides an individual with a specific message. Kwiatkowski (2019) pointed out three essential skills that should be present in communication between business managers and workers: (a) active listening, (b) conveying a message clearly and vividly, and (c) providing performance feedback in a supportive manner. Kwiatkowski suggested that improved interpersonal communication competencies could help business managers in creating WLB for employees.

### ***Hygiene***

Hygiene factors relate to the need to avoid unpleasantness and do not focus on job satisfaction. However, they help researchers to explain the phenomenon of job satisfaction among workers, which can help with WLB (Alshmemri et al., 2017).

Hygiene factors include (a) company policies and administration, (b) relationship with supervisors, (c) interpersonal relations, (d) working conditions, and salary (Herzberg, 1966, 2003).

Maslow (1943) emphasized that humans have five defined sets of needs that they must fulfill in a specific order: (a) physiological, such as their basic need for nourishment as well as the need for rest for their well-being; (b) safety, such as having shelter and being protected from the elements and from harm; (c) love, which includes a sense of

belonging and a need for affection and companionship; (d) self-esteem, which includes self-worth, value, and self-respect; and (e) self-actualization, which entails the individual living up to their full potential. According to Maslow, humans first fulfill their basic need for food and rest, before seeking love and affection. Maslow asserted that an individual would first satisfy their lower needs and then in the process, the higher needs would become known. Use of Maslow's hierarchy of needs helped me to identify the strengths and weaknesses that were present for managers who sought strategies to promote WLB and retention for employees. Maslow's theory provides a blueprint of which psychological needs that managers need to address to help workers attain fulfillment. Velmurugan and Sankar (2017) described both Herzberg and Maslow while they explained the differences between the two men and their conceptual beliefs. Herzberg was a psychologist, and he discussed factors and concepts of what elements should inspire employees (Velmurugan & Sankar, 2017).

### **Voluntary Employee Turnover**

Mobley (1982) concluded the conscious and deliberate willingness by an employee to leave their employer or the probability of leaving as a turnover intention. Business managers should thus look at the future direction of voluntary employee turnover and what if anything can deter the process. Voluntary employee turnover costs upwards of \$550 billion annually (Gallup, 2015). Turnover and a lack of job involvement or job satisfaction due to insufficient managerial support or a lack of trust also cause WLB issues (Arekar et al., 2013; Shukla et al., 2013).

According to Shukla et al. (2013), employees' work-related behaviors, either with their job or their environment, can lead to employees not leaving their jobs but avoiding unpleasantness in the workplace. Although there was a lack of work-life balance, the perception laid in the business manager's mindset of submissive, where there was a personal and emotional attachment, and the focus was on the organization rather than the job itself (Shukla et al., 2013). There is a body of theoretical and empirical research on voluntary employee turnover dated to 100 years ago (Lee et al., 2017). Decisions by employees to stay in place in their organization or move on to other opportunities are areas of concern that managers have addressed by seeking contingency plans (Lee et al., 2017).

Understanding the value of human capital and the value that employees held in increasing organizational efficiency was critical (Rahman, 2014). Hygiene factors helped managers build a healthy working venture that contributed to a conducive work environment. Business managers must recognize that job dissatisfaction can occur when employees lack essential elements, such as adequate pay, job security, career development, and other critical job-related factors (Rahman, 2014). According to Hofaidhllaoui and Chhinzer (2014), voluntary employee turnover was inevitable when an employee's perception lingered around unsatisfactory hygiene factors. Business managers must make strategic plans to create a work-life balance and prevent voluntary turnover and job dissatisfaction.

Reduced voluntary employee turnover was a benefit to IT business managers through increased longevity of skilled workers and considerable profit margins (Cloutier

et al., 2015). Abii et al. (2013) calculated more than 1.5 million skilled IT professionals would need to fill projected shortages due to an alarming turnover rate of IT professionals and an increased need for their specialization. Terera and Ngirande (2014) provided researchers who studied Herzberg's two-factor theory with data on job satisfaction as well as options to prevent employee turnover. Many researchers refer to Herzberg's theory as a method that researchers used to explain and understand what factors satisfy employees (Band et al., 2016).

### ***Turnover Effects***

Employees experienced a realm of emotions attached to voluntary employee turnover or attrition in some situations, which can have a residual effect on those workers who can incur additional stressors from increased job demands with decreased staffing or overwhelmed expatriates (Giauque et al., 2016). Employees' state of mind and security in an organization where they pursued career advancement and growth can quickly change. Harmful behaviors may replace job security as some employees' experience pressures to maintain the standards which can accompany IT advances in technology or decision-making (Brewster, 2007; Davies & Woodward, 2014).

Stressors that accompany voluntary employee turnover can increase the intent to leave satisfied employees, with an increase in workloads for those employees who chose to remain loyal after managers adjust for staffing or other business issues (Giauque et al., 2016). Turnover effects can also increase undesirable work conditions, which in turn lead to lower organizational performance or productivity in employees. Business managers discussed the impact of a loss of skilled workers and possible work overload, or

emotional demands and work-home conflict, especially if the stress exceeded employees' adaptive capabilities (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Lee et al. (2017) stated that organizational scholars could take several steps to enhance further the understanding of turnover by (a) probing the turnover process with better consideration of time, (b) studying the role of voluntary control on employees' leaving/staying, (c) further investigating how the context in which employees reside influenced going, and (d) opening up the "black box" of the collective turnover process.

### ***Turnover Process***

Within every organization, different issues that can lead to employees either staying or leaving. When evaluating or probing the turnover process, when there are a high number of losses of knowledgeable and skilled personnel, there were probably issues within the organization (Katsikea et al., 2015). Extant management research focused on the what and how of turnover with emphasis on content and processes. Although the turnover process may seem cynical to some human resource (HR) managers, to lose a poor performer can bring positivity to the psyche of those who are overachievers (Deery & Jago, 2015). Poor performers can drain an organization and hinder the efforts of highly skilled, motivated employees. Business managers must continuously assess and focus on strategies to assist in retention rather than turnover among qualified employees (Deery & Jago, 2015).

According to Sukriket (2015), the turnover of IT professions may have disastrous effects on organizational success due to a loss of skilled professionals and a loss of the business knowledge individuals hold. It was also important to note that when an

organization had a turnover, it can come from a high number of unsolicited jobs offers, which were hard for some to turn down even if they are not unhappy in their current position (Rouse, 2001).

### ***Contributing Factors***

**Internal Factors.** Employees may attribute several internal factors as potential reasons behind voluntary employee turnover. Poor performers can drain company efficiency and bring down morale, and cause more significant issues for employers who sought to motivate and increase effectiveness and performance management (Albrecht et al., 2015). Vroom (1964) discussed the importance of providing feelings of competence and rewards in employees for their exerted efforts.

Additional internal contributing factors laid in employee compensation, employee self-worth, and employee recognition programs aimed at increased employee morale. Herzberg (1966) explored motivation from an internal source rather than from external factors that came from external hygiene factors. Bae and Goodman (2014) discussed how employers who offered employees flexible work opportunities as well as family-friendly policies, saw an increase in those who choose to stay. Understand how and what it takes to keep employees engaged within the organization was key to satisfaction and employee retention (Singh, 2010). In addition to creating a positive work environment, management also provided employees with a structure, in which the employee can perform and even exceed work expectations, due to their motivation to do their best (Singh, 2010). According to Herzberg (1966), employees' motivation is an internal factor that stems from inner satisfaction and motivation, which an employee felt as very satisfying.

**Job Burnout.** According to Huber (2014), with additional responsibilities and stature, employees may often find significantly less time engaged with family and external activities and more time consumed with work life. Work-related stressors can quickly turn to job burnout, or internal feelings of not enough quality time doing things which were non-work activities. Expanded workloads for whatever reasons can lead to job burnout and internal stressors, which are not only healthy but which lead to internal challenges that can create work-life balance situations, which may seem impossible to handle (Huber, 2014). Job burnout occurred when work-life related challenges and stressors spilled over into other areas of a person's well-being, such as; behavioral and health-related issues (Huber, 2014).

Burnout can lead to abusive behavior towards colleagues, family members, and anyone in the path, as an individual spiraled out of control at times. There can also be substance abuse, verbal abuse, depression, divorce, suicidal thoughts, and aggressive behaviors that accompanied the struggle of job burnout on an individual's quest to gain work-life balance (Huber, 2014). Huber (2014) stated that burnout was a psychological syndrome that occurs as a response when an individual went through overwhelming exhaustion. Some symptoms created from work-life conflicts or a lack of accomplishment when there was a desire to gain work-life balance and determined where one has strived or failed to succeed.

Work-related stress and burnout were internal factors that occur in individuals and affected all aspects of personal and professional lives (Huber, 2014). Most notably, personally, individual health and well-being and personal relationships can suffer, and

from a professional level, there may be several dysfunctional behaviors that hindered career satisfaction and development (Huber, 2014). As a business manager who sought out strategies to identify and prevent internal factors such as burnout from arising in skilled IT professions was monumental for not only organizational success but also to sustain and maintain competitive advantage and avoid the loss of valuable assets for the organization (Huber, 2014).

Business managers should continuously offer outlets for their employee's internal peace of mind and look at implemented proven stress busters (Sukriket, 2015). Durant and Huckaby, (2015) suggested that a holistic approach, such as mind, body, and spirit activities, which nurses sometimes use, were helpful to relieve pressures. Durant and Huckaby, (2015) discussed trends which several nurses used to include work-directed and person-directed interventions, such as meditation, respite rooms, and psychological debriefings, which helped to relieve the burden that accompanied stress.

Durant and Huckaby, (2015) offered healthy alternatives to manage stress and burnout and provided self-care activities, which included healthy eating, exercise, adequate rest, and meditation to help with gained internal peace. All of these activities can assist with regained work-life balance. Atheya and Arora (2014) discussed the need for employers to create work-life balance in their employees by introduced initiatives, such as allowed employees to work from home, part-time work, or telecommute, and others. According to Atheya and Arora (2014), there are several opportunities to create a balanced professional-personal life for their employees by setting up work structures.



**External Factors.** There were factors tied to money, promotions, competition, better hours, incentives, branding, and recruitment bonuses. Some business managers used these factors to seduce IT professionals to stay with their organization, which kept skilled employees while also attracted potential applicants (Harden et al., 2018). Employees want to know that employers recognized the work they performed and showed a continuance commitment (Aslani & Fayyazi, 2015).

In addition, when they were not satisfied, it can lead to turnover, especially when future employers may offer flextime or telework policies, which may appear appealing for workers who need to attend to personal or family needs (Mokyr et al., 2015). According to Kossek et al. (2011), there were integrators and separators in organizations; the separator handled separating work from non-work and understood the value of separate work-life boundaries and the establishment of formal flexibility policies.

**Job Creep.** Employees have felt burdened and allowed job creep to factor into their work decisions. Job creep occurred when an employee felt that management had approved a slow yet subtle expansion of job duties, which can be problematic for an employee who struggled to separate work and personal time and space (Van Dyne & Ellis, 2004). Any increased work hours or responsibilities easily led to voluntary employee turnover, especially if an employee felt a lack of autonomy over their work hours (Hyman et al., 2005).

If an employee felt a lack of work-life balance, false expectations from management can lead to additional issues. According to Van Dyne and Ellis (2004), job creep occurred when an employee must focus on placing job duties ahead of personal

interests for the betterment of the organization, sometimes at a cost to the employee's well-being. Job creep was another example of employees pressured from managers or co-workers at work of not meeting unwritten expectations of doing more than what is in the job description (Bolino et al., 2013).

Some employees stated that meeting the undue pressures of their in-role responsibilities affected their personal lives. Yet, others found that they handled their extra-role behaviors flawlessly, and their supportive actions resulted in management gains of a competitive advantage (Bolino et al., 2013). Job creep happened slowly, and managers did not compensate or provide additional benefits to employees who do more. There was no reward system for such services performed through the form of salary or promotions, and some employees felt the lack of reciprocity was just another reason to leave their work environment (Van Dyne & Ellis, 2004).

Managers may use job creep as a decisive factor for those employees who want to do more and who see extra-role behavior as an opportunity to learn more and then resume their everyday roles and responsibilities (Van Dyne & Ellis, 2004). Employees may develop positive outcomes that lead to suggestions which focused on flexibility and additional ways to build motivation and improve job satisfaction (Van Dyne & Ellis, 2004).

**Flexible Commitment and Attrition.** Business managers must account for promotions, and retirements of veteran employees within the implementation process, some loyal employees held a commitment to their employer or their organization (Madden et al., 2015). Loyal employees can help with strategic measures for maintaining

work-home balance and employee engagement through relationship building with co-workers and business managers who shared a collective mindset (Madden et al., 2015). Besides, some employees have a commitment due to an established contractual obligation, such as subcontractors, temporary hires, and state or government employees who can fall into different categories.

Employment status, whether full-time, part-time, temp-to-hire, or contract workers, can affect the desire and commitment that an employee placed on their job, depends on the amount of flexibility the employee commits between work and home life (Mokyr et al., 2015). Employees can decide on the level of flexibility they commit to an organization and the level of expectancy they may require. This may not necessarily be through additional self-employment, although some employees desire entrepreneurship (Mattingly & Kushev, 2016).

Mokyr et al. (2015) suggested that there were rises of contract firms who served as matchmakers, in a phenomenon often driven by technology. Autor (2001) mentioned a decline in independent contractors, independent consultants, and freelancers as a portion of the labor force from 1995 to 1999. During that period, although an expansion of information technology industries-there was a definitive significant increase in the fraction of workers employed by contract firms (Author, 2001). Although there was an increase in the number of women in the technological field according to findings from Goldin (2014), the level of labor participation and flexibility by women was slightly higher. With no gap between women and their male counterparts, presumably due to the part-time or flex options available. Further arguments for temporal flexibility present

gender equality in employees pay as another incentive business managers may decide to implement (Goldin, 2014). According to Goldin, 2014, when employees find that business managers provide flexible work opportunities such as when and where an employee can work, employees have additional time for personal and family needs.

Business managers must establish a rapport with employees in which they felt valued and understood, by introducing flexible work, locations and other options from a business perspective, employers gained more effort and more access to valuable skilled workers (Goldin, 2014). According to the National Study of Employers (2014), the increase of business managers who allowed employees the flexibility to work from home has drastically increased in upwards of 81%, allowed workers to determine what was equitable for both parties (Goldin, 2014). There was still a need for future researchers to explore if the flexibility efforts have indeed created a work-life balance environment that produced increased efficiency and allowed employees personal time (Goldin, 2014).

***Workplace Flexibility Practices (WFPs)***. According to Peters (2015), if firms adapted workplace flexibility practices despite recessionary pressures or when management found there were weak demand for labor was to look at possible flexibility options for retention, especially in SMEs where size and resources were scarce. Managers who can implement WFPs may find that they had competitive advantage due to the bonding created with the employee and the balance which may occur between work and non-work commitments (Peters, 2015). Origo and Pagani (2008) discussed supported documentation where the perception of those in business focused on WFPs assisting with not only better work-life balance but an increase in job satisfaction and commitment. Due

to a reduction in accidents, grievances, stress, and labor turnover, which also cut down on voluntary employee turnover. Workplace flexibility and job satisfaction were factors which business managers explored for elements that managers can use to create a work-life balance environment.

**Attrition.** Several employees committed to their job rather than their organization and value the position which they are skilled and motivated to achieve success, those employees remained loyal and at the end of their commitment they retired, or some faced early retirement, for various reasons (Roche et al., 2015). Human resource managers must attain new employees to backfill the losses or make lateral moves to sustain the level of skilled workers. The average costs committed to replacements or backfilling of positions is astronomical, Roche et al. (2015) claimed US industries spent \$11 billion annually in advertising, hiring, and training expenditures precisely due to voluntary employee turnover. To avoid the high costs associated with attrition and voluntary employee turnover required planning and contingency plans for attrition to remain competitive and sustainable (Allen et al., 2013; Ashmore & Gilson, 2015).

**Work-Home Commitment.** According to Cegarra-Navarro et al. (2016), there was a disconnect in employees in SMEs' ability to discover the benefits or opportunities that WLB could provide, due to the lack of time and training of workers who often must multitask. The health and welfare of workers can lead to issues with work-home commitments for those employees who were overwhelmed or who desired change with no viable solutions (Cegarra-Navarro et al., (2016). To bridge gaps in research and practice, I continued to seek out effective strategies that some managers find beneficial to

organizational needs and support employees' home commitment. Some business managers provided telework options as viable solutions that provided workers with alternative work schedules (Atheya & Arora, 2014).

**Employee-Employer relationship.** Cegarra-Navarro et al. (2016), suggested that any SME contemplating a WLB culture should first make efforts to update the relevant knowledge of its workforce. The employee-employer relationship changed due to the processes required to meet the changing needs of building or introducing a new culture. To prevent negative experiences during the implementation process, business managers must accomplish more than introduce WLB practices (e.g., flexible hours, telework, and informational assistance). It was mostly correct if no plans existed to modify the existing prevalent culture in the company (Cegarra-Navarro et al. (2016). Business managers and employees collectively decided on policy changes and which areas potentially had mutual benefits and added value for WLB initiatives in organizations. Burke et al. (2006) stated that positive employee outcomes resulted from a WLB culture help in improving organizational outcomes and potentially created positive support for women who considered advancement. Support from business managers was vital to the overall success of corporate practices that supported women's satisfaction and well-being and can build rapport between the two (Burke et al., 2006).

**Job Dissatisfaction.** Several factors led to voluntary employee turnover to include job dissatisfaction. Job dissatisfaction can occur when an employee expressed devalue or not recognized for the knowledge and skills they possessed. Herzberg (1966, 2003) discussed in depth how job satisfaction does not determine job dissatisfaction and

vice-versa. Although an employee expressed motivation, these feelings do not automatically equate to job satisfaction or even overall indicators of a happy and desirable work environment (Herzberg, 1966).

Acknowledgment of job satisfaction from business managers can come from an office questionnaire that concerned employee happiness or career growth opportunities which the organization may adopt to keep highly skilled IT professionals. Herzberg (2003; 1966), discussed the value that managers can attain through achievement, acknowledge, and the provision of opportunities for employees to grow and develop (Herzberg et al., 1959). Herzberg et al. (1959) asked employees to describe what actions made them feel useful and valued and what actions caused employees to feel bad when they worked to learn the effects on workers' well-being. Employees experienced value and appreciation when the organizational values which the business managers controlled through policies and procedures, was fair and equitable for all parties (Herzberg, 2003; 1966). Business managers need to understand that salary and working conditions affect an employees' job satisfaction and their level of happiness.

**Job Satisfaction.** Researchers have estimated levels of worker job satisfaction with the number of years in which they have been with their organization (Gupta et al., 2017). Researchers suggested that less satisfied workers would resign or quit while those who were satisfied in their positions remained and stay for prolonged periods. The premise behind employee's job satisfaction rested with employees' work and development activities, which produced a happy work environment that outweighed dissatisfaction to equate to an organizational commitment in employees (Gupta et al., 2017).

Employees satisfied with their work opportunities and work-life balance were less likely to voluntarily leave or seek alternative job opportunities when workers experience positive work-related outcomes (Giauque et al., 2013; Taylor & Westover, 2011). According to Lu et al. (2016), employees' positions in their organization may predict the level of job satisfaction, work engagement, and turnover intentions. Due to a study that the researchers conducted, which resulted in supervisors showing a higher work engagement and lower turnover intentions. Still, job satisfaction did not differ across positions (Lu et al., 2016).

Dedication was the key element that significantly contributed to job satisfaction and helped reduce turnover intentions instead of vigor and absorption (Lu et al., 2016). It was also important to note that the researchers found that when supervisors' level of dedication was low, their intentions to leave or other underlying reasons to go could be a reason for managers to seek alternative solutions to please their supervisors (Lu et al., 2016).

**Employee Engagement.** Baldoni (2013) discussed how employee engagement was more than just productivity; it also reduced absenteeism, which effectively maintained employee commitment and as well as safety and quality concerns, which were all positive hygiene factors. The potential for business managers actively engaged with employees through clear communication or other positive interactions was beneficial. Herzberg et al. (1959) theory of motivators and hygiene factors have evolved and were still valuable in strategic planning efforts.



Business managers can engage their employees more to explore if increased supervisor support and engagement practices lead to increased job satisfaction and new employee engagement (Kula & Guler, 2014). Prior research conducted by researchers from 1974 and 1999 compared generational experiences in which job security applied to baby boomers' level of satisfaction and desire to remain employed (Festing & Schafer, 2014). Generation X employees were less loyal and more likely to quit and seek career advancement as a work value, with little to no mentioning of employee engagement as a relevant strategy to retaining employees (Festing & Schafer, 2014). Carter et al. 2014, and Rich et al. (2010) provided a list of six specific areas that related to engagement and burnout in employees who sought work-life balance, specifically they named (a) values, (b) perceived fairness, (c) workload, (d) control, (e) community and social support, and (f) rewards and recognition. According to Goldin, (2014) employees may attach a personal commitment and even an involvement to the organization's mission statement, core ethics, and the values of the organization, all of which allowed for employee engagement (Carter et al., 2014; Rich et al., 2010). The authors discussed the value of employees who had some control over work, which they assigned, and had the freedom to ensure rewards and recognition in a robust supportive work environment in which they found fulfillment (Carter et al., 2014).

**Workplace Engagement.** According to Varma and Russell (2016), employees must experience organizational support from business managers, who understood the effects of perceived stress and turnover intentions. Engagement can influence long-term commitments versus an employee's intent to leave or mere desire to satisfy external needs

and family obligations (Varma & Russell, 2016). Business managers should seek opportunities to create work-life balance rather than work-life conflict with a work-life policy that supported family choices and organizational systems (Kelly, 2018).

Several researchers have provided empirical evidence in support of employee engagement, as positive due to opportunities for corporate benefits such as productivity, task performance, organizational citizenship behaviors, and personal factors of enhanced job performance, affective commitment, continuance commitment, customer service, discretionary effort and some levels of psychological climate (Christian et al., 2011; Carter et al., 2014, Fleming & Asplund, 2007; Rich et al., 2010). Employee engagement and workplace engagement both required a commitment from workers and management for work-life balance (Christian et al., 2011). According to Bloom et al., (2015), in organizations where business managers do not have or support work-life balance programs, there was an 86% reduction in productivity.

### **Retention Strategies**

**Retention Efforts.** When a manager can understand the value, an organization gains when there was a succession plan in place which detailed the returns for an organization's bottom line, the manager successfully retained skilled human capital (Premalatha, 2016). HR managers discussed cost-effectiveness benefits that helped with organizational outcomes that accompanied retention efforts (Premalatha, 2016). There were significant cost benefits associated with retention efforts. Managers required strategies that can deter the costs of termination, replacement, or the need to acquire new unskilled employees to make up for any losses which arose from turnover (Premalatha,

2016). A company can lose the equivalent of a minimum of 6 months of a non-exempt employee's pay and benefits. To compound that loss if the loss was a manager or professional, they may incur a minimum of 1 years' worth of salary and benefits (Premalatha, 2016).

Rouse (2001) discussed Mobley's (1977) model, which factored a realm of emotions and decisions an IT professional may experience, once the individual pondered the choice of quitting. The field of options between the costs of abandoned present occupation to search for a new job. Rouse (2001), also discussed factors which the IT professional must evaluate, such as age, tenure with their current employer, as well as labor-market factors which may stop voluntary employee turnover and help with retention. Mobley (1977) accounted for the loss of seniority, loss of vested benefits, and several other factors which can accompany turnover, whether voluntary or not. It was important to explore aspects of the Mobley (1977) model within voluntary turnover, due to Mobley's assertion that job attitudes, along with job alternatives, accompany a worker's choice to leave.

Voluntary turnover was a process, which often included intent to leave, and some business managers had the responsibility of creating alternative solutions to prevent such actions. Rouse (2001) concluded that an understanding of some of the causes behind turnover as well as identifying potential ways to intervene to stop turnover can benefit both employee and employer. Exploring the demographics of which employees are more likely to stay versus go, Sukriket (2015) showed that 44.8% of employees were willing to stay with their current employer for at least three years. Whereas 41% were undecided

and of that number younger employees with less than two years were more willing to go to another company. Although prior research in the West showed connections between job facets and turnover intentions, Sukriket (2015) discovered that four variables were contributing factors, supervision, benefits, nature of work, and job intentions as reasons of software programmers' turnover intentions. Business managers can look at these variables and analyze how and what they can do to prevent turnover intentions and possibly create work-life balance (Sukriket, 2015).

**Rewards and Recognition.** Business managers hold the power of providing positive reinforcement and recognition for a job well done, which can help build morale among some who may seek alternative job opportunities elsewhere (Madden et al., 2015). Managers affected employees' intentions to turnover; however, they can improve morale and the level of managerial support through guidance and best practices, which foster supportive worker-manager support and encourage positive relationships with co-workers (Madden et al., 2015). Workers enjoyed rewards that offered the potential for growth and those opportunities which valued the insight and input of those affected most by the decision-making for the organization (Madden et al., 2015).

Business managers decided to pay above the competition in some cases to attract and retain talent. Some business managers may offer monetary awards or stock-options for employees whom they paid below the average and which led to a loss of skilled talent (Premalatha, 2016). In addition to monetary rewards, some business managers offered in-house specialized labs or professional development options that provided employees with valuable training and development that added dividends for those who sought growth

opportunities and may prevent an employee from leaving (Guha & Chakrabarti, 2015). Some business managers offered workplace flexibility as a contingent reward system for their female employees with the understanding that choice of work hours allowed readily available access for the employer's needs, particularly in areas with gender gaps (Goldin, 2014).

### **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory**

Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory addresses the motivations attached to human behaviors such as (a) self-actualization, (b) esteem, (c) social, (d) comfort and safety, and (e) physical needs. Maslow's hierarchy of needs addressed first addressing those needs on the lower levels of the spectrum before a meeting of higher-level needs (Sypniewska, 2014). Herzberg shared many of the same attributes in his theory with Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. Still, Herzberg provided motivators and stimulators as factors which assisted employees with the fulfillment of their needs (Sypniewska, 2014). By assessed what factors created work-life balance, a researcher may help business managers develop a strategic plan for reduced voluntary employee turnover. Maslow's theory was the foundation that Herzberg used to explore areas that stimulated employee's needs and provided managers with another area to review.

Although there were many similarities between Herzberg's two-factor theory and Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, Maslow addressed motivational aspects of individuals who satisfied their basic survival needs and then moved forward to discussing their wants and deeper needs (D'Souza & Gurin, 2016). Key elements of Maslow's theory included a breakdown of four needs, which expanded self-actualization, labeled as

deficiency needs. According to D'Souza and Gurin (2016), to include the four essentials that Maslow discussed, namely, cognitive, aesthetic, self-actualization, and self-transcendence. D'Souza and Gurin (2016) described the deficiency need as needs, which allowed individuals to show more compassion, care, problem-solving, and altruism, which those in society can find beneficial. According to Yeboah and Abdulai (2016), Herzberg's theory provided a method that some business managers in a Coconut Grove hotel located in Elmina used as a motivational theory which accounted for changes in customers' expectations and the concept of quality, which are needs-based (Yeboah & Abdulai, 2016).

Researchers found varied outcomes of employees' needs based on Herzberg's theory, which they applied in many cases rather than Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (Yeboah & Abdulai, 2016). Exploration of what factors employees found most beneficial varied from different industries, which could help explain the choice of Herzberg over Maslow or vice-versa. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory focused on satisfying lower levels of needs before moving on to the next level of needs. Business managers should understand that employees' basic needs of physiological and safety needs were the first two tiers of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy, and employees must have both before they can reach self-actualization.

Although there are theories that support satisfied employee's needs, there are also theories which although they emphasize the basics of human needs, they dispute Maslow's theory. Maslow's theory that employees must have higher level needs satisfied before lower-level needs, such as Alderfer's theory (Yeboah & Abdulai, 2016). It was

vital to understand differences and to address various theories to gain a complete picture and understanding; however, Alderfer's theory does not support a work-life balance environment and addressed issues of voluntary employee turnover.

**The Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Work-Life Balance.** Employees spent most of their everyday lives in an environment where they may strive to find a balance between their personal and professional responsibilities (Arekar et al., 2016). The individual's work setting and place of work were factors to consider to create work-life balance. Creating a work-life balance environment can appear daunting or even overwhelming to business managers who do not have a business plan.

Van Yperen et al. (2016) discussed options that some business managers could take to help keep workers intrinsically motivated and productive while expecting performance at high levels. Some business managers attempt to analyze and assess what role they have involuntary employee turnover and what strategies they can contribute as a mediating mechanism to mitigate turnover with the results created more challenges than answers (Reina et al., 2018). Understanding policies and labor productivity of employees in their work environment with ongoing organizational changes and advances in technology can help business managers create work-life balance (Bae & Goodman, 2014). Organizational changes factored into many business decisions, and some business managers experienced pressures to sustain competitive advantages over their competitors through revenue growth and profitability (Fortado & Fadil, 2014).

Business managers must maintain a balance with their people and commerce, which can determine the degree of decreased workplace stress and a positive work

environment (Fortado & Fadil, 2014). Work-life balance existed when employees and business managers attained a balance between personal and work commitments. Some business managers adjusted and set dedicated time aside for planning and brainstorming options for the retention of skilled IT professionals. According to Gaya and Smith (2016) and Noble and Smith (2015), Maslow's hierarchy of human needs (physiologic, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization) related to several concerns with employee burnout and their health and wellness. Managers who adapted Maslow's framework to help with mitigation burnout and created programs that helped workers gain balance and support overall wellness initiatives.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory was a framework that some have used for addressing stress and other moderating effects on the workers' psyche (Gaya and Smith, (2016); Noble and Smith, (2015). Sanderson (2015) emphasized the value that business managers attained if they provided additional training from which an individual can learn to fulfill their need or desire to learn more, which is a motivating factor many seek from their employer. Maslow's theory of provided motivation and belonging to employees' which could create a motivated workforce that can further help with workforce retention and work-life balance issues, was relevant. Sanderson (2015) emphasized collaboration and innovation as motivational tools where technology-facilitated teamwork can help employees to achieve balance as some struggled with a maintained work-life balance in their workplace.

Explored social and environmental causes of why some workers sought opportunities to gain work-life balance were additional reasons why some organizational



leaders recognized the value of differentiation in their organization from others to retain talent (Sanderson, 2015). Helping workers to establish work-life balance through a mission statement that inspired workers who sought employment was a grand marketing scheme that Sanderson (2015), boasted as not only inspired and motivated but one that attracted the best and brightest talent for organizational needs.

**Physiologic Needs.** Employees should separate work from non-work experiences to ensure they are not sleep deprived or lack satisfaction of basic physiological needs. Employees' sought to fulfill requirements such as eating on a schedule that does not mean skipping meal breaks due to job demands or deadlines, which required timely submissions. Gaya and Smith (2016) and Noble and Smith (2015), acknowledged multiple reasons that factor into worker burnout and a lack of good health, due to contributing factors.

Factors discussed ranged from a lack of access to proper nutrition, sleep deprivation, social isolation from friends and family, and long work hours, which interrupted non-work commitment (Gaya and Smith, (2016); Noble and Smith (2015)). There were also issues of little to no time for self-help or self-care programs, and therefore relationships with colleagues, managers, and family easily suffered. Workers also incurred a loss of control and poor mentorship, which can also include a pile of excessive paperwork leading to additional stress or burnout (Gaya and Smith, (2016); Noble and Smith (2015)).

Singh (2010) discussed the importance of understanding when there was proper functioning at home and work with minimal conflict, incurred in the role an individual

played from day-to-day, then there was work-life balance. Employees must determine how they maintained their dual roles and at what expense. Singh described work-life balance was the ability of individuals to have a say in the amount of time they worked, when they worked and even how they worked. Wheatley (2017) discussed several work-life balance policies, that factored into benefits that business managers offered to employees. Some found the option as a win-win outcome, which could produce employee satisfaction.

**Safety.** Workers expected a safe and secure environment as they performed their day-to-day work activities and accorded to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. There were expectations in place that managers abided by the rules set by the department of labor. Rules implied that nearly every employee in the nation received protections under OSHA's jurisdiction with limited exceptions for miners, some transportation workers, many public employees, and the self-employed (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.). All workers employed in the information technology field working in the United States expected their employer to provide work and a workplace that was free from recognized, serious hazards (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.).

**Workplace Safety and Health.** The intent of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA, 1970) is to guarantee all workers, whether federal employees or working in the private sector, a safe working environment. President Richard Nixon signed the labor law governing the federal law of occupational health and safety to all employees who worked in the United States, on December 29, 1970. Congress enacted the law in 1970. Leip and Stinchcomb (2013) argued that employees who worked in a safe and secure

environment felt that it was vital to their success. Successful employees were less likely to seek outside employment and may work toward organizational success, but not if they must sacrifice outside commitments to complete their work tasks (Leip & Stinchcomb, 2013). Business managers must evaluate work conditions to continue to not only ensure safety but also for adjusted or developed strategic initiatives that helped establish with reduced voluntary employee turnover. Managers' ability in a provided safe workplace can also help in created an individual's overall stress levels to a comfortable level that was healthy and good for work-life balance (Ross & Vasantha, 2014).

**Love/Belonging.** Brough et al. (2014) conducted research that established that some employers who have created a supportive employee-employer relationship have found that there are both family and job satisfaction, which was supportive of a work-life balance environment. Employees tried to balance work and family responsibilities had a sense of loyalty to their employers. They valued their time and commitment to their families as well.

According to Nielsen et al. (2017) it was crucial to reduce stressors which employees experienced, and both personal and work-related stressors added up to substantial costs for IT managers when employees failed to show for their work commitments. Employees needed a sense of belonging in work and non-work activities, which required balance. Russo et al. (2016) stressed the importance of workers in work and non-work who received support to achieve balance in the spheres of work and life. Researchers found that work-life balance helped with employees who found positive energy as well as the development of psychological availability (Russo et al., 2016).

**Self-Esteem.** An individual's self-esteem can come from any area of their life in which there are feelings of satisfaction or an individual experienced a harmonic life that aligned with the individual's system of values and their aspirations (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). According to Gawel (1997), individuals may spend time reaching a level of personal esteem and may have felt some satisfaction with themselves, which Maslow referenced as a middle-level need and yet still not feel satisfied or feel they have accomplished self-actualization. Gawel (1997) also stated that the survey of various levels of teachers showed that the teachers' self-actualization was prepotent for their esteem needs. Along with self-esteem, there was also evidence to support those individual reputations also factored into individual needs (Gawel, 1997). Although the researchers used the results from a specific set of demographics, the information can fit within a work-life balance environment in which business managers sought additional strategic measures or answers to support their staff.

**Self-Actualization.** D'Souza et al. (2015) discussed Maslow's self-actualization theory that stated that once employees satisfy their basic needs, the desire to realize the individual potential was vital. Future researchers may continue sought after information on whether self-actualizing values can materialize into self-actualization actions. When employees felt that they have value in the organization in which they worked, there may be a sense of importance that fulfilled and motivated. Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory (2003), placed some focus on what occurred with a motivated employee who achieved self-actualization. According to Ivztan et al. (2013), an individual achieved self-

actualization when they met their desire to grow, create, and utilize their capabilities at a high level of success.

### **Vroom's Expectancy Theory**

Vroom (1964) originally developed the expectancy-valence theory currently referred to as Vroom's expectancy motivation theory (1964), this theory aligned several factors which business managers may attribute as motivating factors in employee satisfaction which aligned with this study. A critical element in Vroom's expectancy motivation theory was that Vroom (1964) suggested that employees demonstrated a positive work performance behavior for their business managers when they believed that the action resulted in rewards and recognition. Vroom's expectancy theory contained the elements that allowed recognition for participants who wanted to achieve and based their achievements on the results. Participants behaved and performed in a manner that led to successful performance, and business managers directly related their actions to Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory. Business managers may attribute employee's performance and their efforts as a valuable desired reward for overachievers or those who base their performance appraisal as a contributed factor into their overall work motivation and wanted to satisfy personal needs (Hsu et al., 2014; Suci et al., 2013).

Within the expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964), were three antecedes in which participants found the motivation that determined the amount of effort put forth for a particular result (Hsu et al., 2014). Vroom's expectancy theory allowed managers the latitude to believe in job satisfiers and dissatisfiers were reasoning that some employees leave an organization. Still, the lack or presence of either did not guarantee that an

employee felt less fulfilled or satisfied. Business managers sought reasons an employee lacked satisfaction and explored behaviors of those satisfied to reduce employee turnover or developed strategies to understand employee's needs. According to Yeheyis et al. (2016), Vroom's expectancy theory was related to the business model due to several similarities, such as the rewards and advantages that high performers reaped, as well as an individual effort, and own performance for workers. Vroom (1964) indicated continuous that awards and recognition were motivating factors that managers used to entice their workers and provided satisfaction.

**Employee Satisfaction.** Job satisfaction and turnover intentions occurred when employees felt a certain way towards work-life balance (WLB), data collected from 265 questionnaires from Aslani and Fayyazi (2015), there were a positive and negative connotation attached to employee's satisfaction and turnover intentions. Although the authors did not display indisputable evidence that those who do not have a positive WLB reveal high turnover intentions, or produce a substandard commitment to their employers, some lacked motivation and failed to find satisfaction in their workplace (Aslani & Fayyazi, 2015). Velmurugan and Sankar (2017) discussed the findings of researchers that detailed the importance for workers to find and have work that is both fulfilling and structured to pay appropriately. The researchers pointed out better worker motivation, process enlargement, task enrichment, promotions, internal and external stipends, monetary, and non-monetary reimbursement, all were key in the promotion of employee satisfaction and retention (Velmurugan & Sankar, 2017).

## **Social Exchange Theory**

Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) defined social exchange theory (SET), as one of the influential conceptual paradigms that occurred in organizational behavior. As a business manager, to understand theories that researchers found are influential can assist with employee engagement and maybe with addressing gaps and adding additional knowledge to concerns. Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) discussed four areas that they believed required additional research and focused on conceptual difficulties within the paradigm. The four areas addressed by Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) included (a) the roots of the conceptual ambiguities, (b) norms and rules of exchange, (c) nature of the resources exchanged, and (d) social exchange relationships.

Understanding voluntary employee turnover intentions and the many areas of concern, which participants perceived as supportive measures from business managers, also included examining the social exchange theory lens. According to Madden et al., (2015), managers applied the social exchange theory lens to build trust and understanding in employees and helped with making organizational support. Madden et al. (2015) stated that managers insertion into employees' WLB needs and helped to reduce stress factors and the need to voluntarily leave an organization, due to dissatisfaction reduced when employees felt that managers had a vested interest and cared. Business managers experienced increased productivity and saw a happier creative workforce focused on maintained employment. Necessarily, managers' mutual exchange of respect and understanding led to reduced voluntary employee turnover due to social exchange theory concepts, and participants' belief that they mattered (Madden et al., 2015).

Participants of the study provided detailed examples of how they maximized personal benefits while they also found they had limited to no particular disadvantages in their work environment. According to Harden et al. (2018), to study social exchange theory and investigate the approach more in-depth allowed managers opportunities to explore various aspects of information technology (IT) professionals in their interrelationships between turnover intentions and organizational commitment. According to Homans (1958), business managers explained how and why individuals respond in different manners when employees working conditions changed and when there were various levels of engagements. When each party engaged, there was an exchange of values, and both participants gained something, and both paid the price (Homans, 1958).

Social exchange theory (SET) involved understanding that over time relationships developed into a trusting, loyal, mutual commitment in which parties had an exchange with set rules in place (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The caveat of the exchange was "normative definition of the situation that formed among or was adopted by the participants in an exchange relation" (Emerson, 1976, p. 351). The relationship factor was essential to business managers who sought to build a positive, mutual relationship with their workforce. The information, which Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005), collected was vital because it could help researchers to expand future research of how to exchange orientation can influence organizational relationships which were of value to understand development between employees and their employers (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).



### **Small Business and Small-Medium Enterprises (SMEs)**

The population which I researched consists of small business and small-medium enterprises in which business managers employed fewer than 500 employees across their organizations. Researchers within the Small Business Administration (2014) attributed a growth of 63% of new jobs that came from small businesses and small-medium enterprises from 1993 to 2013. The growth in this sector represented a significant amount of growth within the overall economy (Sarwoko & Frisdiantara, 2016). Small business and SME employees contributed a great deal of economic growth in the US, according to published reports (IHS Global Insight, 2014). Of the 8 million jobs attributed to this workgroup, workers produced more than \$490 billion in GDP, and the expectation reported from the International Franchise Association, (2014) was that workers in this category have faster job growth and overall growth than the rest of the U.S. economy in 2014.

The overarching question within the population from a business perspective was how business managers sustained such a workgroup and reduced voluntary employee turnover and maintained a work-life balance. Mishra et al. (2015) suggested that small business employers gained a trustful relationship among employees that entailed open communication and build strong interpersonal relationships that may prevent unwanted turnover. According to research conducted by Kim (2012), several representatives of Korean SMEs encouraged the development and implementation of programs that adhered to the financial and cultural conditions of the organization, which did not align with employees' needs and wants. A lack of funds in SMEs can slow down or hinder success;

however, there was also an option to develop and implement programs with other SMEs located in proximity (Kim, 2012).

### **Transition**

Section 1 contained the problem statement, the purpose statement, and the nature of the study and aligned with a multiple case study design. Additionally, section 1 included (a) a central research question and interview questions, (b) a conceptual framework, (c) operational definitions, (d) assumptions, limitations, and delimitations, followed by (e) the significance of the study. Section 1, concluded with; contributions to business practice and implications for social change, along with a comprehensive review of professional and academic literature regarding the topic of work-life balance in IT SMEs.

Section 2 included the following; (a) restatement of the purpose statement, (b) role of the researcher, (c) research participants (d) research method and design, (e) population and sampling, (f) ethical research, (g) data collection instruments, (h) data analysis techniques, (i)reliability and validity of the study. Section 3 contained a breakdown of the methodology of the study. Chapter 3 focused on the critical points associated with this study and concluded with the results, my recommendations, reflections, and my conclusion. In section 3, I provided a review of the application to professional practice, and I addressed the implications for social change. Section 3 concluded with my synopsis of strategies that some IT business managers used to maintain a work-life balance environment with reduced employee turnover.

## Section 2: The Project

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies SME IT business managers used to develop and implement an equitable employee WLB environment. The population identified in this study comprised five IT business managers in five SMEs located in the Southeastern United States who developed flexible work opportunities that helped reduce turnover and improved WLB and retention of skilled employees. As Kossek et al. (2011) asserted, managers have a significant role in ensuring WLB for their employees. The implications for positive social change are that the findings could help local IT managers improve work and life balance. These actions can foster a collaborative work environment, which could lead to reduced turnover, benefitting the local economy through a reduction in job losses and fewer unemployment claims.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I was the primary data collection instrument of my multiple case study research, and my role included collecting and organizing the data, selecting participants, classifying emerging themes, and ensuring the validity and reliability of data processes. My role as the researcher was to identify and mitigate my potential bias and ensure that the data collection process and data analysis did not contain tainted or flawed information that might affect the credibility and validity of the study. Dasgupta (2015) discussed the role of the researcher as inductive due to the limitations of not imposing preexisting expectations on the setting. According to Marshall and Rossman (2014), my

responsibility also was to provide a compelling argument for future researchers to sustain the study of the phenomenon of interest. IT is a vital part of every industry, and as a frontline supervisor, I experienced the loss of skilled workers when there was an uptick in voluntary employee turnover. I asked participants questions and sought to put aside any personal bias of the phenomenon to provide thick data that could assist future researchers. As the researcher, I had the responsibility to be consistent and follow the *Belmont Report* guidelines and protocol (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1979). There are three ethical standards: (a) respect for persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979).

I followed these guidelines to reduce bias and avoid inadvertently leading participants to answer questions based on my preferences. I used member checking and data saturation to mitigate personal bias. I used member checking to ensure that I accurately depicted participants' views and not my interpretation. To reduce potential bias that I may have had due to my relationship with the research material, I applied member checking, an interview protocol, transcript validation, as described by Secolsky et al., (2011), and review. I ensured that I reached data saturation as a strategy to mitigate my personal bias. By using an interview protocol, I was able to ensure consistency with each participant throughout the interview process. Researchers use interview protocols as a guide to help prevent deviation from the original purpose and to ensure standardization (Yin, 2018). Appendices A and B contain the interview protocol and questions, respectively.

## **Participants**

Participants in this study were IT business managers from five SMEs, all recognizable companies, in the Southeastern United States. Each participant was required to have specific knowledge of employee behaviors and WLB within the IT environment. Bryson et al. (2013) discussed advantages in the use of multiple strategies to gain access to participants. Due to the limited sample size of participants, I used criterion-based purposeful sampling, which is a process some researchers apply to identify data, participants, and sources (Patton, 1990). I based the parameters on the need to answer my research question with a diverse population of participants who directly engaged in the business problem. As Marshall and Rossman (2011) noted, criterion-based purposeful sampling ensures an accurate and balanced representation of participants who have lived experience of the study phenomenon. The criterion-based purposeful sampling included the following criteria for participants in the study: (a) managers who were currently employed at an SME, (b) HR managers who conducted hiring and exit interviews, (c) HR managers who could share experiences and perceptions of voluntary employee turnover, (d) frontline managers who had no less than two years' experience in the IT field, and (e) supervisory managers who were tasked with organizational and worker efficiency metrics. HR manager participants provided pertinent information on the percentage of voluntary employee turnover and what factors influenced workers who chose to stay compared to those who did not find WLB. The frontline managers in the study were able to address motivators and worker efficiency and offer guidance on strategies for achieving WLB.

To gain access to participants for the study, I contacted IT business owners and set up a mutually agreed meeting time for Skype and Zoom interactive semistructured interviews. I also gathered information through active listening and engagement with participants in a relaxed agreed-upon location where I could ask probing questions with no distractions. To build a good rapport, I engaged each participant in a warm and pleasant manner. These actions allow the participant to speak freely, which can be beneficial and productive for the study results (Young, et al., 2018).

I used frontline managers to gain access to participants who might also provide essential data that I could analyze as factors that relate to job satisfaction or dissatisfaction, Herzberg et al., (1959) depicted both of these areas as independent factors that authors might assess. The participants included supervising managers who have strategies to reduce voluntary employee turnover in SMEs located in the Southeastern United States. These characteristics align directly with the research question concerning what strategies IT business managers of SMEs develop and implement to improve the WLB environment.

Yin (2018) posited the value and the benefits that participants have for a study when their experience provides vital information for the research study. Selecting participants who add value to the study phenomenon is critical to gaining rich, reliable data that provide future researchers with strategies for increasing productivity and enhancing the WLB environment,(Thomas, 2017) which aligns with the study's overarching research question. Participants chosen for this study consisted of individuals who successfully implemented such strategies.

## **Research Method and Design**

### **Research Method**

Researchers may consider three options as their choice of methodology: (a) qualitative, (b) quantitative, and (c) mixed-methods approaches (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). I used a qualitative method for the study. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), qualitative research is a good option for understanding the lived experiences of participants. A qualitative method allowed for face-to-face interviews and the use of semistructured interview questions. By asking semistructured interview questions, I was able to further explore the strategies or actions managers used to reduce voluntary employee turnover and potentially increase WLB. I examined several methods used for strategic planning, and decided that I would follow a qualitative approach. Gaya and Smith (2016) argued that a qualitative approach gives researchers a more realistic approach compared to other methods for strategic planning. According to Frels and Onwuegbuzie (2013), researchers gain broader insight as to where participants stand when they ask questions that do not limit the sharing of experiences or relationships.

Qualitative researchers gain valuable information by asking how, where, and what questions; these questions are not compatible with a quantitative approach (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). A qualitative research method is the most appropriate for asking participants open-ended questions (Venkatesh, et al., 2013). Qualitative researchers record data that are not in numerical form, instead of measured opinions, feelings, and experiences as in quantitative research (Clark & Vealé, 2018).

If qualitative researchers gain access to participants in their natural environment, they can allow for the collection and analysis of data through participant discussions (Yin, 2018). Therefore, I used a qualitative research method to obtain the participants' experiences and perspectives. According to Allen (2015), the researcher can interpret qualitative data to gain valuable insights. A quantitative method requires testing of hypotheses and the established relationships between independent and dependent variables; use of this method allows the researcher to develop a theory (Park & Park, 2016). The quantitative method not appropriate for this research. I was interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences. According to Park and Park (2016), qualitative research can add further understanding of a phenomenon through analysis of participants' lived experiences. Mixed methods combine quantitative and qualitative methods and are time-consuming (Yin, 2018). Researchers who use a mixed-method approach focus on analysis of relationships rather than the participants' real-world experiences (Yin, 2018). A mixed-methods approach was not suitable for the study.

### **Research Design**

Nazari (2013) discussed three types of qualitative designs: case study, ethnography, and phenomenology. I chose the case study design because it provided a clear understanding of the personal experiences of the participants. Researchers use the case study design to explore individuals or organizations through their relationships or environment (Yin, 2018). According to Yin (2018), the case study design is the most appropriate method to ask how or what questions. The multiple case study design was



most appropriate because it allowed me the opportunity to explore strategies that some business managers have implemented to reduce voluntary employee turnover and increase organizational efficiency. I used an exploratory multiple case study design because it provided the opportunity for me to ask additional questions, and conduct research to understand the specific phenomenon behind the retention efforts business managers incorporated to keep skilled IT professionals. The case study design was the most appropriate for the collection of data consisting of company policies and procedures and the participants' responses to my interview questions.

I considered other qualitative research designs, such as ethnography, grounded theory, narrative, and phenomenology; however, none were suitable designs to answer the research question for the study. According to Masue et al. (2013), ethnographic research involves an in-depth investigation of participants' behaviors, as well as visual and verbal cues. Lewis (2015) described ethnography as a process that requires a significant amount of time and entails studying the culture and social interactions of a few or many individuals. Researchers define the experiences of participants as a significant phenomenon in their use of phenomenological designs. According to Bevan, (2014), some researchers used themes to contextualize interpreted experiences. Ethnography and phenomenological research designs did not fit the purpose of my study. Therefore, I did not use either design for the study.

Data saturation occurs when the data collected do not lead to any new information (Lowe et al., 2018). Fusch and Ness (2015) added that, when there is no longer a need to apply to code, and no new data are attainable, data saturation is apparent. I concluded that

data saturation had been reached when there were no new themes and the data were repetitive. According to Denzin (1978, Denzin, 2018) presented data triangulation as a possible method that a researcher can use to achieve data saturation. I conducted triangulation through the use of publicly collected data, semistructured interviews, and archival data, and other documents.

### **Population and Sampling**

The target population for this study consisted of five IT business managers in the Southeastern United States, who have conducted strategic planning measures that created WLB and reduced voluntary employee turnover. The five participants worked at five SMEs. I conducted interviews and collected data from participants' and company documents, employee handbooks, and public records. In case study research, researchers can analyze multiple data sources (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

The sampling method for this study was criterion-based purposive sampling. Criterion-based purposive sampling offered the flexibility to select participants from a specific industry who met the guidelines to adequately answer the interview questions. Patton (1990) pointed out the value of including various participants to gain multiple perspectives. According to Otuka et al. (2014), criterion-based purposive sampling allows researchers the opportunity to select participants who have related information, which may help further future studies.

I set specific eligibility criteria to ensure that I reached data saturation. I focused on my selection of five IT business manager research participants as an adequate sample size to achieve data saturation. Several researchers have discussed a sample size between

four to 12 participants as a range for qualitative research to reach saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Marshall & Rossman; 2016; Yin, 2018). Fusch and Ness (2015) stated that data saturation occurs when no new themes or information emerges from interviews.

Participants provided a location that offered privacy and the opportunity for the participants to speak freely and honestly, which avoided bias. Yin (2018) emphasized the importance in the use of using the participant's lived environment to gain credible information for a study. I ensured limited to no distractions helped to get a clear picture as to what participants experienced as I conducted interviews and allowed for the participant to feel at ease during the process in which I interacted with them in their real-life work environment (Yin, 2018). I selected SMEs due to the size of the participant pool, and I used a quiet location, which was secluded from distractions. I obtained a clear recording of the participant during our online interview in which I used the interview protocol in Appendix A.

I stressed the importance of obtaining a clear record and the necessity to place the participant at ease as I gathered data. Fusch and Ness (2015) discussed the importance of securing data saturation and ensuring the number of participants was adequate in achieving data saturation. O'Reilly and Parker, (2013) stressed the need to understand that there was no one size fits all when collecting data, it was crucial to recognize both appropriateness and adequacy. The choice to select five participants from five SMEs focused on ensuring a mixture of different views and perspectives. The use of criterion-based purposeful sampling was to concentrate on business managers in the IT field who could provide data from their years of experience in the industry.

### **Ethical Research**

Before starting any interviews, I ensured that I adhered to research ethics by following the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process to protect participants (Yallop & Mowatt, 2016). Marrone (2016) discussed the process of informed consent when conducting ethical research with participants. I disclosed all aspects of the qualitative study as well as withdrawal procedures. The process included a plan which protected researcher integrity and assured participant privacy and confidentiality. Participants could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences before finalizing the review. Participants also relied on complete confidentiality and anonymity; there were no known risks associated with the study. There were no incentives promised or inferred to participants in exchange for their participation in the study.

Sanderson et al. (2016) addressed qualitative researchers' use of an informed consent form to ensure the use of an ethical process while conducting research. Each participant received an email invitation that disclosed the intent of the study, along with a letter of introduction containing the participant consent form. Appendix C contains the letter of introduction and Appendix D the invitation. Participants signed the consent form to acknowledge their commitment to participating in the study. The consent form outlined the nature and purpose of the study. I logged each email along with the participants' informed consent form as an accurate record of receipt and acknowledgment.

According to Knepp (2014), those with higher trait worry more and were more prone to read informed consent forms to alleviate uncertainty and trust concerns. I asked each participant to give an affirmation if they were willing to participate in the study and

explained that their participation was strictly voluntary. I also stressed that there were no monetary or non-monetary incentives involved in the study. I also explained any risks or benefits of participation, according to Check et al., (2014), it was essential to provide all of this information to avoid misunderstandings.

Participants could withdraw at any time, either verbally, via email, telephone, or a simple refusal to answer interview questions. In alignment with the National Institutes of Health, I ensured that there was no harm or emotional threat for the participants of the study (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). I used human subject protection and applied the Belmont Report (1979) principle of respect for persons, which guaranteed that even in the age of social media and age of significant data, autonomy and security were still critical elements for maintaining integrity. I successfully passed the National Institutes of Health web-based training course *Protecting Human Research Participants* to demonstrate my commitment to produce a high-quality, ethical research study, which protected participants' rights. Through the training, I learned to ensure that I maintained the ethical protection of each participant by masking their identity.

According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), researchers must protect participants' identities; after five years, I will destroy all data I have securely stored with a cross-cut shredder. After I have safely placed all the data on the assigned USB and secured in a secure location for the next five years, I will destroy any written notes or other interview transcripts. According to Roman et al., (2016), researchers bore an essential security requirement in ensuring that data was protected at all times, even when stored, including any credentials that also may accompany such data.

Before conducting any research, I gained approval from Walden University's IRB; the approval number for this study 10-01-20-0729610, and it expires on September 30, 2021. After obtaining approval, I started the research process. I established trust and a firm commitment to maintain data integrity. I ensured that I violated no written laws, and I did not cause any undue emotional stress or bodily harm to any participant. I reviewed the consent form before interviewing each participant and ensured that each participant has a signed copy of their approval to participate. I assigned pseudonyms such as P for the participant, followed by specified coding of a number to ensure that I protect participants' identities. To ensure identities remain masked for five years from the study to provide transparency and preserve confidentiality.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

I was the primary data collection instrument and analyst for this qualitative study. Ranney et al. (2015) discussed the researchers' commitment to developing and representing a systematic method for the data collection process. Yin (2018) stated that the qualitative researcher represents the primary data collection instrument. As a secondary data collection method, I used electronic means for semistructured interviews with open-ended questions (see Appendix B). I also used document review, and review of archival records to gather data for the study and explore any underlying themes. Using semistructured interviews, I explored strategies that IT business managers used to create work-life balance. Kallio et al. (2016) acknowledged that semistructured interviews were a data collection instrument a researcher used that allowed for data collection and analysis to coincide, which led to additional probes in the study.

## **Semistructured Interviews**

By using a semistructured interview technique as a data collection instrument source in case studies, researchers obtained more productive data analysis (Runfola et al., 2016). I gathered evidence to receive answers to the interview questions with semistructured interviews as instruments in the data collection process. I asked questions if any answers appeared not clear. I also adhered to the agreed-upon interview time, not to exceed 60 minutes. I ensured that I conducted the interviews at the set time and agreed upon location. Each participant answered the same prearranged interview questions (see Appendix B), which offered detailed information and understanding of data (Serafini et al., 2015). Researchers were instrumental in the data collection process, as the researcher represented primary data collection and are data analysis instruments (Paradis et al., 2016). Fusch and Ness (2015), emphasized that the researcher was the primary data collection instrument. The responsibility to ensure a high-quality, bias-free study that contains the participants' views through semistructured interviews, was essential to the study (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Participants shared their experiences in a live one-on-one recorded session, and I gathered evidence in which they answer open-ended questions through the use of a Sony digital recorder. Information participants provided shed insight on what strategies IT managers used for work-life balance. Yin (2018) stated that researchers should use an interview protocol to keep questions consistent for all participants. To enhance the data collection process, I ensured that I only asked the questions I developed in the interview protocol (see Appendix A) to ensure confirmability.

Rowley (2012) described the semistructured interview as an instrument that the researcher used to gauge participants' perceptions and behaviors in a research study. According to Yin (2018), when researchers applied open-ended questions, they allowed participants the latitude to give a broader perspective and reduced bias. By mitigated bias, I learned which leadership strategies were most effective to reduced turnover. Yin (2018) described data collected from face-to-face interviews as another instrument to ensured efficiency in the data collection process. I applied member checking follow-up questions to provide additional data from participants to gain clarity and enhanced the validity and reliability of the study.

### **Documentation**

Secondary data collection methods I used consisted of semistructured interviews and transcript review. According to Al-Emadi et al., (2015), when participants reviewed documentation, they were provided an opportunity to validate responses. Also, I used archival records provided by IT business managers that detailed voluntary employee turnover. When researchers used participants' natural environment, the experiences were authentic lived experiences that provided the researcher with data to analyze and interpret participants' answers in real-time through open dialogue and transcript review (Yin, 2018). I conducted a follow-up with IT business managers to ensure that I gained access to internal company documentation.

Company documents were essential pieces of data that a researcher used in a case study to gain data from published and unpublished business documents. Yin (2018) stated that documentation was vital to the data collection process. I reviewed and analyzed



company documents; company documents include policies, procedures, employee handbooks, charts, graphs, as well as standard business strategies that business managers used to assess employee satisfaction, and work responsibilities. Archival data allowed the comparison of current data against prior data and future data. Archival records were documents, such as written guidelines, strategic plans, and operational data that I used to triangulate data. Yin (2018) stated the importance of documentation in corroborating multiple data sources in conjunction with participants' responses. McIntosh and Morse (2015) highlighted the advantages of analyzing data sources ethically.

### **Member Checking**

Member checking was a process that researchers performed to test the reliability and validity of data collection instruments and methods while enhanced trustworthiness (Morse, 2015; Yin, 2015;). With member checking, participants determine if the researcher understood the participant's intent. Member checking was beneficial to researchers as a method of authentication of study conclusions and participants' responses (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

I conducted member checking after each interview to enhance the reliability and validity of the participants' responses to the interview and follow up questions. Participants reviewed transcribed interviews and then agreed or changed the collected data (Morse, 2015). I also followed the suggestions of Yin (2018a) and Morse (2015) of assurance that participants reviewed and corrected any omissions or misinterpreted data interpretation, through member checking to verify the validity of responses. I allowed each participant a reasonable amount of time to review answers before the final study.

Leonidou et al., (2015), discussed the use of member checking as a source which showed accuracy, credibility, and validity when transferring participants' responses. Using member checking in my research study established a firm understanding of reliable, valid data collected during interviews of participants (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Bindl (2019) specifically asked participants to describe the actions they took at work or were currently taking to express their feelings and experiences they incurred during the interview process.

### **Data Collection Technique**

Data collection techniques were fundamental procedures used in gathering pertinent data that the researcher attained in answering research questions (Morse, 2015). Using data collection techniques consisted of semistructured interviews, documentation review, and archival data helped with evaluating the reliability and validity of the completed research (Morse, 2015). Yin (2018b) discussed the value in the use of multiple sources of data; as such, I used interviews, observations of participants, and internal websites.

My analysis came from semistructured interviews and document reviews, along with open-ended interview questions (see Appendix B) to elicit responses from participants. The steps I took in the data collection process consisted of emailing and calling participants to confirm their participation. To verify the accuracy of participants' responses and transcript review, I used member checking and ensured I confirmed responses verbatim. Campbell et al. (2013) discussed the importance attributed to accurately documenting participants' responses when conducting semistructured

interviews. The interview protocol (see Appendix A) served as a guide which helped participants to share their work and non-work experiences for the study openly. Dikko (2016) described using the interview protocol as a data collection technique that added to the reliability and validity of the research study. I understood that there was a possibility that participants may not have answers to the questions that I asked, which could hinder an accurate assessment of the study. Houghton et al., (2015) discussed coding of data to assess common themes or patterns for comparison and analysis of possible relationships or variances. I used NVivo software to code, manage, and analyze data. Fusch and Ness (2015) explained researchers' responsibility in establishing a clear understanding of the ethical review process to ensure research participants knew all data will be kept confidential for five years before destruction, and there is a code of conduct.

### **Semistructured Interviews**

I used a face-to-face semistructured interview protocol to allow the latitude to gather detailed responses, along with consistency from participants. According to Young et al. (2018), interview responses strengthen the documentation analysis with the information provided in the participants' own words. Following an interview protocol (see Appendix A), I asked semistructured interview questions (see Appendix B) to elicit participants' views.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2008) discussed the skills, sensitivity, and knowledge of the researcher, in producing a quality product as the primary data collection instrument. I asked follow-up questions to ensure I captured the participant's intent and not my own. The interview protocol was an instrument that I used for all participants to provide a

standardized process that is identical and consistent, giving in-depth responses to interview questions. Yin (2017) described value in the interview protocol as a technique that offered researchers a deeper understanding of the phenomena of the study. It was valuable to rephrase interview questions if participants were confused or showed a lack of interest to establish clarity (Ellis, 2016). I contacted each participant after I received approval from Walden University's IRB (approval no. 10-01-20-0729610, expiration date September 30, 2021). To start the interview process, I explained the nature of the study. I then reminded participants of their right to withdraw at any time in the process; before the conclusion, and I again gained consent. I reminded each participant of our agreed-upon one hour scheduled semistructured interview. I used electronic means for face-to-face interviews online through an online application, a familiar, comfortable environment were ideal for bonding with a participant (Turner, 2010).

Although I planned on conducting each interview in a comfortable and quiet environment with enough time for each participant, I realized that obstacles could have arose, and I recognized benefits and limitations. The benefits of a comfortable and quiet environment, helped to place participants at ease, and possibly led to more forthcoming answers. As the researcher, I observed some participants face-to-face, I could see body movements and facial expressions, which provided cues of comfort levels. Through the use of interviews, researchers see the participant's facial expressions as well as body movements and reactions to questions (Russo et al., 2016). Limitations of live face-to-face planned interviews for researchers can be time constraints. Participants' may also lack dedicated time to adequately address any work-life conflicts that may hinder

gathering actual versus perceived issues. I used a Sony voice recorder to record my participant's responses accurately. Grossoehme (2014) reflected on the researcher's responsibility to protect participants' identities; therefore, to avoid exposing any of the participant's identities, I removed any identifiers from recordings that could reveal participants' identities. I also reminded participants that all notes and records are strictly confidential, and all encrypted data was on a password-protected USB, which only I can access, which I will destroy 5 years after study completion.

Houghton et al. (2013) discussed limitations associated with participants' lack of focus on the use of audio recorders. I tested the equipment before collecting data by having each participant speak into the recorder and played back the test for accuracy. I also had a back-up recorder device in case there were any technical difficulties with the first audio recorder. A limitation to the audio recorder was recording participants may not be easy for those recorded; therefore, it was my responsibility to offer comfort and assurances. Obstacles occurred, such as not enough scheduled time, or the need to extend the interview or schedule an additional follow up for completion (McIntosh & Morse, 2015).

Additional benefits of interviews included time management, by sending out emails; there was a record of the participants' reconfirmation of their consent to participate. Emails also offered the benefit of sending out a mass message to multiple individuals. However, a disadvantage to electronic mail is it could prove costly if technology issues arise, or the participant did not respond timely or at all. Over the phone, I ensured that my tone was inviting to the participant and did not give the wrong

message. Oltmann (2016) discussed over the phone as a cost-efficient measure over semistructured face-to-face contact. The methods I used included the plan to send out requests via electronic mail, the personal connection of a phone call, and through video recordings of prospective participants.

### **Documentation**

I used publicly available documents and internal company documentation, as well as prior research data, each provided sources of qualitative data to researchers, this method is one of several annotated by Yin (2018). Current company data was used as a guide, and I compared multiple data sources. Triangulation of sources on policies, procedures, and other critical elements, I enhanced the trustworthiness of strategies and data on employee work-life balance and employee turnover. As the primary data collection instrument, interpretation of the data through transcript review was an advantage a researcher could attain, while realizing that field notes are not owned and can be skewed (Denzin, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Wolcott, 2005). Participant responses were reviewed for accuracy and analyzed to ensure there were no inaccuracies or deceptive measures from researcher interpretation (Houghton et al., 2013). McIntosh and Morse (2015), discussed the advantages of allowing participants the ability to answer freely as a positive step for researchers. Disadvantages associated with company documents included data that may lack the full participation of workers or may limit work from non-work life balance affecting retention and satisfaction (Deery & Jago, 2015). Yin (2018) stressed the importance of the researcher not adding personal bias by

asking questions not associated with the research questions or those which may be leading.

### **Member Checking**

Member checking was a quality control process used to verify data collected from participants is an accurate recollection of their viewpoint (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Birt et al., (2016), stated how the researcher used member checking when interpreting data to correct and validate data findings. Participants reviewed, tested, and confirmed interpretations to enhance study reliability and validity (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Morse, 2015; Saunders et al., 2015). I checked with participants and followed through to validate their statements and make corrections should the need occur. Fusch and Ness (2015) identified member checking as a trustworthy process of the qualitative data process.

Yin (2018) discussed identifying key themes and repetitive patterns from collected data, which was crucial during the data analysis process. To increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the research, I conducted member checking. Member checking was a process that ensured participant's intent behind their answer was in alignment without guesswork or misinterpretation of what the participant said (Dikko, 2016). The benefits of member checking were that participants can add new or relevant information during the member checking process to improve the study's reliability and validity (Birt et al., 2016). It was a challenge for researchers when participants decided to change written documentation or provide a different version of handwritten documentation. According to Timsit et al., (2019), researchers' tasks include the challenge of accurately documenting and transcribing participants' interview notes, which

can lose the benefits in interpretation or member checking processes. Morse (2015), discussed reviewing documentation as an additional validation measure.

### **Data Organization Techniques**

Qualitative researchers used multiple data sources for organizing and tracking data collected from semistructured interviews, company records, and archival data. According to Elo et al., (2014), data organization techniques, entailed first collecting the data and then conducting an analysis. Yin (2018), discussed the importance of sorting data and coding themes appropriately for understanding. I used this method as a technique to accurately keep track of participants' data. I planned to analyze and track participants' documentation followed by chronologically processing the data. Afterward, I placed everything on a USB drive and assigned a pseudonym. I set an organized tracking system by placing a P for the participant and a number following, such as P1; P2; P3; and so forth, which disguised gender and any human-identifiable features. Petrova et al., (2016) pointed out this method as a way to ensure anonymity. I then analyzed data, collected from interview transcripts, as well as coded data, and any themes or recurring patterns identified. I entered the compiled audio files from the Sony digital recorder, as well as my documents, observation notes, and organization data into NVivo directly after each interview to maintain the integrity of the study. By placing the information into the NVivo software I gained an understanding of emerging themes.

Rashnou et al., (2017) described the process of collecting data from semistructured interviews and keeping track of participants' data using a digital recorder. I planned to use a Sony digital recorder to accurately record participants' data, as well as



reflective journals and a planner, Microsoft Excel, and NVivo to adequately track the dates and times when I met with my participants. Yin, (2018), discussed the process of accurately recording and reviewing data to produce a quality analysis.

Campbell et al. (2013) discussed the importance of ensuring anonymity in research participants. I logged my interview notes in a reflective journal to capture what participants relate to as relevant. After the study, after I receive approval from Walden University Chief Academic Officer, I provided the security of the journal by placing it in a lockbox, with a combination which only I can access, which I will destroy after five years. I ensured that I deleted all audio or digital recordings once I completed member checking of the collected raw data.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was a detailed process, in which I explained each step of the interview protocol. I used methodological triangulation to conduct the processing of collected interview data, observations, and company data, which according to Heale and Forbes (2013), allowed the researcher to form a complete picture of collected data. Morse (2015) described the researchers' role as one who listens to alternative points of view, examines, and synthesizes data, but takes responsibility for results, to include implications and applications.

I used generic coding to ensure the confidentiality of each participant (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Participants' privacy was essential to ensure that I protected participants' rights. Yin (2018) discussed five-phases researchers used to analyze data collected, which began with the compiling of data. Breidbach and Maglio (2016) addressed the usefulness

of compiling existing data to gain any new insight into additional information that one may attain from data compilation. The use of thematic analysis was a systematic approach that I applied to generate codes and themes from all the qualitative data that I collected.

Yin (2018) suggested five steps for conducting qualitative data analysis, which consists first of compiling data. I gathered the collection of answers from participants' interview questions, ensuring that I transcribed the recorded data verbatim along with company documents and external websites filtering out relevant from non-relevant themes and patterns which addressed the central research question. I also reviewed current and past strategies of IT business managers to verify any reoccurring strategies. Clarke (2015) discussed using NVivo as a tool to identify themes after collecting qualitative data and entering coded data. NVivo software aids researchers against a biased assessment and offered transparency and alternative views.

### ***Compiling***

Yin (2018) addressed researcher bias and suggested that researchers acknowledge differing views accordingly. Houghton et al., (2015), discussed compiling of data and comparing items with prior research to see if there were recurring themes. I gathered data from the various resources of support from work and non-work sources to view, which helped to create a work-life balance environment that was essential to the study. By compiling data from transcripts, document reviews, transcribed notes, and audio recordings, I placed the data in successive order for consideration. All participants received a transcribed summary copy of the analysis of answers from the interview

questions (see Appendix B) of the research for review. Next in the process, I disassembled the data.

### ***Disassembling***

I disassembled the data by using the NVivo tool to sort and disassemble collected data from semistructured interviews, document reviews, and transcribed documents. This process entailed placing all of the collected data into different categorized piles. As the case study researcher, the second phase involved disassembling data. I applied this step to direct observations and company data to assist in focusing on the collection of various data sources that I used to decipher and dissect information. As I examined and organized the data, I also cross-referenced data and conducted a document review to compare current data from prior documentation, observations, and participation of participants in their live environment. I also analyzed participants' responses to interview questions to address the central research question: What strategies did IT business managers of small to medium-sized enterprises develop and implement to improve the work-life balance environment? I then sorted code words into categories to identify themes.

After I identified recurring themes, I assessed what if any value IT business managers strategic planning plays on employees' work-life balance. I then reassembled all of the separated collections. Interpretation of the data occurred before analyzing the study. Firmin et al., (2017), discussed the ability to use electronic assistance to process raw data and then disassemble the data into detailed textual analysis to assist with coding.

### ***Reassembling***

The third step is reassembling data. Morse (2015) described the process of reassembling data as an opportunity for the researcher to develop themes or recurring patterns that identify the meaning of participant's words or phrases. Elo et al. (2014) discussed reassembling collected data to interpret recurring themes. The ability to reassemble the data and code correctly can assist future IT business managers in developing a workable strategic plan. I placed the data into different clusters and categorized them into different groups and sequences.

NVivo software is a user-friendly software tool I used to gather qualitative research. As the researcher, I identified themes and data coded into categories and easily accessible by using Microsoft Excel and NVivo. NVivo tool is a software program, according to Woods et al., (2015), that some researchers use to sort out patterns or recurring themes. I transcribed the audio recordings along with written data of the participants, and used NVivo, and I gathered recurring themes and patterns in participants' work environment. I then interpreted the audio recordings from participants whom I conduct semistructured face-to-face interviews. Nusbaum et al. (2017) stated that discussions should take place in a convenient location for participants and in-person for an accurate assessment of the participants' feelings, or possible bias. I used company policies and procedures, semistructured interview data, notes gathered on participant observations, and any additional data sources available for triangulation.

### ***Interpreting***

The fourth step is interpreting data. Yin (2015, 2017) discussed the role of the researcher in interpreting collected data for analysis. The researcher's knowledge of a given subject was valuable in assessing and interpreting data. Knowledge of IT business managers concerning strategic planning to create work-life balance assisted with interpreting words, phrases, or themes.

### ***Concluding***

The last stage of data analysis involves listing the conclusions of the research data. Yin (2018) discussed the importance of collecting large data sets for in-depth information that researchers used to address follow-up questions of participants. Nielsen and Hjørland (2014) concluded that there are both empiricisms, which deal directly with experience and observation and positivism, which are scientific methods associated with data perspectives. Furthermore, researchers may use data as an input to produce new outputs, that Nielsen and Hjørland (2014), stated can turn into new inputs. Researchers' may use the concluding findings to help in organizing data for future use (Nielsen & Hjørland, 2014).

Heale and Forbes (2013) suggested that the use of multiple data sources was an acceptable method researcher used for triangulation. Yin (2018) suggested that researchers first compile and describe data before transcribing online electronic face-to-face interviews or company data. Methodological triangulation was a method that researchers used to assist in preventing bias from the use of only one data source. I used

at least two modes, possibly more, to ensure methodological triangulation as I conducted my research.

I used the interview protocol (see Appendix A) to help in interpreting the participants' feelings and beliefs. Interview protocols are a resource that researchers may use to align research questions. They also provide structure in interpreting interview responses (Birt et al., 2016; Marshal & Rossman, 2016).

Some IT business managers recognized some of the many benefits centering around offering employees work-life balance opportunities. In some IT communities, business managers have found that the ability to create mutually beneficial strategies can lead to competitive advantages. Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory was the foundation of the study; methodological triangulation occurred when participant interviews, company documents, direct observations, and multiple sources was entered into the NVivo software tool for data analysis.

### ***Software Tools***

I also used Microsoft Excel, which according to Kupzyk and Cohen (2015), as an inexpensive data entry method that researchers used when seeking an economical way to collect data without breaking the bank. I also used handwritten notes and a planner or Sony digital voice recorder to compile participants' data. Using member checking along with reviewing company data, I familiarized myself with several strategies to analyze the data which I collected while applying Yin's five phases of analysis to process the data (Yin, 2018). Kornbluh (2015) stated that member checking was the standard when developing and establishing trustworthiness in research.

I may have a bias on the subject material due to my subjective lived experiences. Member checking was a useful and necessary tool that I used to deter my preference and enter the participant's skills rather than my own. To ensure that I gave an accurate depiction of the participant's lived experiences, I adhered to the guidelines outlined in the American psychology association [APA] 2015. Fossey et al. (2002) discussed the importance of a researcher to assume responsibility throughout this process to ensure that they capture the participants' subjective meanings, actions, and social contexts, rather than make assumptions. According to Mason (2017), researchers must review and analyze several methods that they can use to determine which strategy is best for their research. After I collected participants' responses, I interpreted my data and coded responses that aligned with various themes or patterns which prior researchers may have also captured.

According to Yin (2018), researchers sometimes find recurring themes and trends among groups or similar patterns and use the information to classify various groups to gain future insight. When no new information emerged, and no new themes were present from participants' knowledge, data saturation was current. One method which I used consisted of emailing participants transcripts for their review of our electronic face-to-face interviews, to ensure accuracy and an accurate depiction of the participant's thoughts. Kornbluh (2015) depicted the value of alignment between participants' responses when that recorded in the interviewing process differed from responses collected during the data collection process. There are several reasons that such differences arose, participants may articulate what they feel other participants or the

researcher wants to hear, or the participants' may not feel comfortable in the setting chosen to ask the questions.

As the researcher, I assessed each situation to ensure I gathered useful material to depict conformality as well as differences accurately. Methodological triangulation was a research method that involved the use of two or more sets of data using the same methodology (Gibson et al., 2014). Interpreting and analyzing participants' interviews, company documents, and archival data were all pertinent documents that required additional analysis, which I used to identify key themes. The coding of the collected data aided in my interpreting and identifying key patterns and themes. Vaughn and Turner (2016) addressed coding as one method researchers used to input collected data in a systematic process, which was easier to understand, especially in large data sets.

Organizing and classifying qualitative data through the use of thematic coding was one method I gathered qualitative data and captured descriptive data that others can gain a wealth of meaningful data for later use (Given, 2006; Habich, 2008). After identifying and classifying themes, I compared, contrast and integrated critical items through the use of NVivo software, and I ensured alignment with the study, which helped support consistency (Bogers et al., 2017). Collectively, I identified research gaps within various themes and collected data that can help with future research.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Qualitative researchers addressed issues surrounding; dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability to address and ensure reliability and validity standards (Fusch & Ness, 2015). By using set protocols and establishing trust early participants can



acknowledge the correct recording of data collection or refute any misleading or misquoted information (Yin, 2018). Polit et al., (2012) discussed the importance of helping participants to establish trust lies in developing confidence in the truth of the study, which in turn leads to trust in the findings.

### **Reliability**

Through my use of data collection, analysis, and interpretation of data, I provided dependability to the study by establishing protocols and procedures which according to Zohrabi, (2013) helps participants gain trust and confidence in an assessment. According to Yin (2018), researchers develop reliability in qualitative case studies when following protocols and results remain the same. I applied triangulation in my research as an approach to ensure dependability and confirmability. Qualitative researchers can use member checking to transcribed notes and tape-recorded interviews, as well as company reports, to address personal feelings and beliefs (Connelly, 2016; Fusch & Ness, 2015).

### **Dependability**

Amankwaa (2016) discussed the importance of readers' acknowledgment that a study was worthy of consideration, which helped in establishing dependability and validity. I addressed any misunderstandings as I reviewed transcribed notes and provided participants with results I interpreted from our interviews, which addressed confirmability. Dependability was a trait that researchers also seek during the research process; Koch, (2006) stated that a study was dependable when replicated researchers' findings used a similar group of participants in the same conditions. Connelly, (2016) pointed out several areas that researchers used to establish credibility. Researchers

applied methods that included developing a long-term or extended relationship with participants, as well as prolonged observations of participants if it is appropriate to the research study. Connelly, (2016) also suggested peer-debriefing, member checking, and reflective journaling, as additional tools that a researcher applied to establish dependability, reliability, and validity. To ensure data saturation by following up with the IT business managers who have developed strategies that create a work-life balance environment until no new themes emerge and data continues to replicate.

### **Validity**

I used several methods in the study to ensure validity. Leung, (2015), researched the benefits a researcher can achieve towards obtaining validity when using multiple perspectives. I included member checking, company data, and participant interviews, Noble and Smith, (2015) stated that such factors help researchers apply triangulation to their findings. Iivari (2018), also stated that participants increase both internal and external validity of the research through the use of member checking. According to El Hussein et al., (2016), a researcher established confirmability when they are objective in their data collecting and reporting process. Triangulation was one method researchers used to develop that analyzed collected data results were valid, unbiased results. Birt et al. (2016) discussed the value of the use of methodological triangulation to establish and validate collected data from participants. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), a researcher should reach data saturation to help ensure others recognize the presence of confirmability, credibility, dependability, and transferability of the study.

**Credibility**

Polit et al. (2012) depicted the credibility of the study as the most important criteria that a researcher must provide. The findings and the data collected are elements in which the researcher provides the truth, and there was confidence established that the researcher had provided an accurate assessment of the study. According to Anney, (2014), researchers used member checking in studies help to solidify the credibility of their research study.

Amankwaa, (2016) discussed several reliable techniques researchers could use to establish credibility and show the truth. With member checking, I built a rapport with participants chosen for the study, and the use of a reflective journal throughout the process to establish a long-term commitment to a truthful reflection of the data collected. In establishing credibility, it benefitted the researcher to collectively discuss the findings with participants to develop that there was a true reflection of the data. As I conducted my face-to-face interviews, I continuously did member checking to validate that my interpretation correctly reflects the participant's views to ensure validity. Peer debriefing and triangulation were a few suggested alternatives researchers I used to establish finding truth in a study. According to Amankwaa, (2016), credibility was also essential to the truth.

**Transferability**

Throughout the research process, I used member checking to ensure that there were accurate reflections of participants' views on the findings. Fusch and Ness (2015) discussed the importance of the use of member checking in a qualitative study to increase

the researcher's dependability of conclusions. It was also important that I established trust early in the research process with participants, by allowing participants to review what I had interpreted, with the interview protocol, they were able to provide feedback to help ensure clarity. I also enabled the participants to review and confirm the data I transferred in the study for accuracy. According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), the researcher holds the responsibility of ensuring accurately transferred data through accurate and detailed reporting. Data should not contain errors or gaps, not verifiable. It was vital to provide a clear, descriptive report in which future researchers can conduct future studies. Iivari, (2018), expressed the need researchers have to use member checking as a means of placing participants in co-analysts or co-interpreter's role to assist with realistically transferring data.

### **Confirmability**

It was the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that those contributing data receive clear representation to minimize the researcher's bias, personal influences, or perceptions. To ensure corroborated participant's outcomes, and accurately depicted narratives, Noble and Smith (2015), discussed the researcher's removing preconceived notions, to establish, rigor, integrity, and confirmability. Iivari, (2018) discussed confirming researchers' interpretations as well as correcting errors and challenging any inaccurate translations and reassessing viewpoints to ensure confirmability. Through the use of triangulation of company documents, archival data, and interviews, I validated the study highlighting what others research had also yielded and duplicated, adding to confirmability. Marshall and Rossman (2016) discussed the importance of duplicating

prior studies as the research process unfolded and established trust and confirmability of the study's data. Fusch and Ness (2015), sharply pointed out that researchers can achieve data saturation by asking participants the same questions, with no recurring themes or the duplication of data.

### **Data Saturation**

Lowe et al. (2018), acknowledged that data saturation was present when there was no new information collected in the research process despite asking repetitive questions. To ensure data saturation, I scheduled interviews with a minimum of five IT business managers who met the requirements of the study. I asked additional follow up questions and continued asking IT business managers for clarity to understand what strategies IT business managers created and aligned with work-life balance until no new information surfaced to ensure data saturation. According to Tran et al., (2016), researchers recognized data saturation at that time and may either continue the study to find new themes or stop understanding futility.

### **Transition and Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore successful strategies some IT business managers used to create a work-life balance environment. IT business managers in small to medium enterprises used to create a work-life balance environment. Sutton and Austin (2015), stated that researchers conducting a qualitative research method, seek out ways to analyze the thoughts and feelings of participants in the study. In Section 2, I provided the purpose statement, followed by the role of the researcher, participants, the research method, and the research design. I addressed the

population and sampling, and I described the ethical requirements and the standards for the research, I also specified data collection instruments, and data collection techniques. Finally, I discussed the data collection instruments, followed by data collection techniques and the methodological triangulation I used to ensure the reliability and validity of the study. I explained the processes used to analyze and share information participants provided to ensure that I assessed and accurately interpreted and depicted information. In Section 3, I addressed the following: the introduction, a presentation of findings, application to professional practice, and implications for social change. Also, I discussed the recommendations for actions, suggestions for further research, reflections, and conclusions. Section 3 ends with a conclusion to the study.

### Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies SME IT business managers used to develop and implement an employee WLB environment. Terera and Ngirande (2014) discussed the importance of reducing employee turnover and the role that managers play in creating strategies to increase retention. I retrieved data on the subject by conducting semistructured interviews with several IT business managers from SMEs located in the Southeastern United States. Khazanchi et al. (2018) suggested face-to-face, semistructured interviews to allow sharing of information and collaboration with participants. In addition, I analyzed company documents, policies, publicly available data, and personnel handbooks to obtain credible data for the study. The findings from the study indicated that managers' strategies were important for improving WLB and reducing voluntary employee turnover.

Data collection started once my committee members and the IRB approved the study; Walden University's approval number for this study is 10-01-20-0729610, and it expires on September 30, 2021. I sent emails, calls, and texts to participants to confirm their consent to participate in the study. Sanderson et al. (2016) emphasized the importance of obtaining consent before conducting the research process. Biros (2018) added that the researcher's responsibility also extends to assessing the decisional capacity and vulnerability of each participant. According to Biros, researchers must provide safeguards against research-related harms. It was my responsibility to respect the autonomy of my participants. I protected each participant from burdens and risks while

also ensuring that benefits were also equally distributed. Each participant answered six specific questions (see Appendix B) to yield data on potential strategies some IT business managers used to reduce voluntary turnover among skilled IT professionals and to create WLB within their organization. Due to Covid-19, interviews were all via electronic methods. Participants determined the setting for the interviews to ensure a comfortable environment.

My interview notes, audiotapes of conducted interviews, video-conferencing, and emails, along with the organization's available policies, procedures, and personnel handbooks, all received scrutiny to ensure credibility and validity as I looked for recurring themes. After I analyzed the collected data, I interpreted the participants' responses. Next was member checking of my interview notes, an audit of the audio recordings, and a thorough review of organizational policies, publicly available data, and employee handbooks to ensure research credibility. A word cloud generator, Microsoft Excel and Word, and NVivo 12 Plus software assisted in my identifying four emergent themes: (a) work-life balance, (b) communication, (c) flexibility, and (d) job satisfaction. After identifying these themes, I compared my results with other peer-reviewed studies to support my findings. The data collection processes allowed me to attain credible information applicable to answering the research question.

According to Akekar et al. (2016), high motivation is essential to workers, I analyzed answers from all five participants. P1 through P5, emailed and teleconferenced responses to the interview questions, provided very motivating factors in answers to the interview questions. I observed relaxed managers who exuded confidence in the



organization's strategies concerning increasing WLB for IT employees. I discussed other findings in this section. Section 3 also includes the application of the study to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action and for further research, reflections, and a conclusion.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

The purpose of the multiple case study research was to gain insights on an overall strategic plan that IT business managers may use to create WLB and possibly prevent voluntary employee turnover. I developed the research question to address the problem and purpose of the multiple case study. The overarching research question of the study was, what strategies did IT business managers of small to medium-sized enterprises develop and implement to improve the WLB environment? To ensure that I addressed the primary research question, I conducted in-depth, semistructured interviews with five HR or IT business managers who currently used strategies that they have found beneficial in obtaining WLB balance. After receiving IRB approval to start my research, I started contacting and scheduling one-on-one, semistructured interviews with five participants of SMEs who met the criterion-based sampling guidelines for the study.

I phoned, emailed, and texted over 20 potential participants in the data collection process, and five consented to the interview process. Each participant received a phone call at a mutually agreed upon time, and I discussed the audio recording of our conversation for later transcription and accuracy. McGrath et al. (2019) noted the value of recording participants' answers to accurately depict information for later transcription. All participants received an electronic version of the consent form via email, fax, or

scanned version to ensure that I had their approval before I scheduled their interview. I assigned each participant a pseudonym upon receipt of their returned consent form, in the order received. Each participant was identified as Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, Participant 4, and Participant 5 to ensure that I protected their identities. I also used Company 1, Company 2, Company 3, Company 4, and Company 5 to identify the companies used for this study.

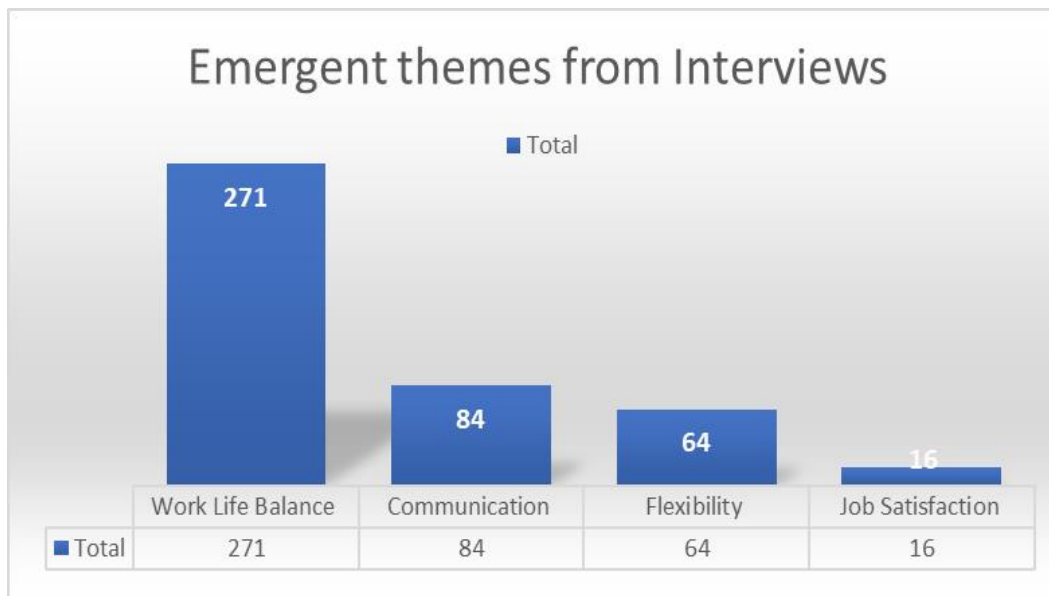
I followed Yin's (2018) five-step process of compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding as the foundation for analyzing the data. I ensured that I reviewed all of the participants' documented conversations, and I reviewed my transcribed field notes related to the research question. Barrett and Twycross (2018) discussed the researchers' body language and mannerisms, as one of many areas to consider during the interview process. In addition, Barrett and Twycross (2018) discussed maintenance of a chronological log of each interviewee for accuracy and later interpretation.

As I conducted data analysis, I placed my focus on any themes that appeared to align with the central research question and the conceptual framework. I discovered data saturation was achieved as I continued to notice recurring themes and phrases between my participants' answers (see Figure 1). Fusch and Ness (2015) discussed data saturation and researchers' asking probing questions to gain data for research questions. Specifically, Fusch and Ness, (2015) discussed repeating and recurring themes as patterns of no new data, and data saturation. There did not appear to be any new information shared between Interviewees 3-5, and I captured repeating phrases that I coded and



from the HR and IT business managers. I triangulated the data by reviewing online company documents of business records, publicly available records, and field interview notes which outlined organizational methods in current use. Fusch and Ness, (2015) discussed the importance of methodological triangulation in research to avoid researcher bias and provide multiple perspectives of data. To capture concrete data and to add reliability to the field notes, I attained publicly available organizational data.

According to Katz et al. (2019), researchers can achieve a higher level of validity and reliability by presenting documentation with participants verbal responses. I compared the participants' currently used strategies with the methods that were outlined in prior studies to see if there were any similarities to note as effective or repetitive. The purpose of the study was to identify successful strategies IT business managers implement. After I transcribed the interview notes from each participant, I decided to use Microsoft Word and Excel before placing the data into Microsoft Word Cloud generator and NVivo for transcription and data analysis. Using thematic analysis, I was able to group the codes into categories, resulting in four emergent themes: (a) work-life balance, (b) communication, (c) flexibility, and (d) job satisfaction (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2***Emergent Themes from Interviews*

The themes from the study aligned with those I identified in the literature review. Herzberg's (2003) two-factor theory includes hygiene and motivation factors. Both factors contribute to the WLB environment, relationships that employees have, and workplace conditions described in Theme 1. All five participants described communication as an essential factor between managers and participants in creating WLB and retaining skilled employees.

**Theme 1: Work-Life Balance**

I used a thematic approach to code data, which consisted of assigning codes to the participants' responses to help me keep track of key concepts. Placing the codes into categories helped me to identify the employee-employer relationship related to WLB. As I reviewed the frequency of use, I noted that WLB appeared 15 times, which gave it a weight of 0.457. The emergent themes are included in Table 2. The first theme that I

noticed repeating from participant to participant was WLB; P1 described not setting meetings at 16:30 on a Friday when many employees have family obligations and other things outside of work that may distract them from being productive. As P1 stated, “being stuck in a business meeting at the end of the day which could easily drag on” and did not create a WLB environment.

P1 also described an even greater need to provide work/life balance in response to the pandemic, which has allowed workers to work from home, assessing that strategies were necessary to create balance in workers’ lives. P1 stated the following: not having a camera on employees had helped from a work life balance perspective, for those who may not have gotten out of bed and gotten dressed for the day.” Most importantly P1 stated that it was crucial for the business manager to check in with their workers and simply ask “what do you want?” and “what do you need?” P1 stated, “it can make all the difference in a person knowing that you are there and you care about their well-being”.

### ***Management Engagement***

P1 also acknowledged that unhappy workers who will complain no matter what you do have an impact on the work culture and climate. Patel and Hamlin (2015) discussed the importance of management engagement by checking in with employees and soliciting feedback to understand worker values. Strategies such as these that offer a give-and-take relationship that is reciprocal can help with employee retention and WLB. P1 stated that straightforward meetings work from a business perspective and the company has a resource mailbox that is an opportunity for workers to ask questions of concern. All five participants expressed the need to maintain a workforce of skilled IT professionals

by self-regulating their actions, therefore reducing the need to recruit additional talent. P1, P3, and P5 all mentioned human capital and management engagement, each provided documentation that specified the importance in their organizations. Participants in this study provided strategies that managers implement internally and share with other hubs or offices they are connected to. The participants also stated that they follow many of the industry standards and best practices as their guides for creating work-life balance and to keep up with rapid changes in technology. Once the work-life balance strategies were implemented, P1 assessed if the employees were both working and productive. P1 and P3 stated they found innovation, trust, and actual onboarding were producing good results, and workers provided useful feedback. Most employees felt a sense of being and work-life balance in day-to-day activities worth exploring further.

**Table 2***Comments Supporting Theme 1: Work-Life Balance*

Participants	Comments
Collaboration with team members	<p data-bbox="787 514 1404 661">Workers are addressed as members, to provide a sense of ownership as a team of one, who share in the success that comes from building a world-class company together</p> <p data-bbox="787 703 1404 924">Company data from C2, C3, and C5 explored ways to fulfill potential – there are no confined borders or pre-defined paths. Within these companies, workers are empowered to solve problems and brainstorm ideas in their own unique way.</p> <p data-bbox="787 955 1404 1102">Assignments may include participants creation of systems design that fit into their work-life utilizing, the best means of achieving development.</p>
Employee company website	<p data-bbox="787 1207 1404 1354">As one team, employees share in the global success, and experience of sharing in challenges and rewards, and being a part of our culture of ownership.</p> <p data-bbox="787 1386 1404 1459">Created an atmosphere to protect the safety and welfare of employees/customers who we serve</p> <p data-bbox="787 1501 1404 1617">The best version of us starts with you. And members are influenced to understand that the best version of you starts here.</p>

Participant 3 stressed that there are times when, “I find that I have to force my employees off the floor at the end of the shift by telling them "work will be here" some



feel they have to finish everything before they leave, but to maintain a healthy work home life they have to unplug. P3 provided one strategy of “off the floor policy” which is in place to force employees to leave their work station prior to the end of their work day to ensure that enjoy their personal time and time off the clock. Understanding that work can wait, was one of the areas which P3, stated helps the worker to unplug and put the work down to reduce stress. As a manager, P3 stated that employees have burned out and work has suffered when employees fail to balance their work and personal lives. P3 discussed the below standard work of the employees, when there is a lack of balance between personal and homelife.

#### ***Collaboration With Team Members***

P3 boasted the quality of work and performance outputs when employees used the “off the floor policy” to separate from their work. P3 did not agree with workers working off the clock from home due to the lack of available overtime hours that the job can offer the employee. Many of the documentation that the employees handle was sensitive, and therefore, to prevent unauthorized disclosure P3 did not advocate for off-the-clock telework. P3 also acknowledged that it took a collaborative effort of the team at times to ensure that work was completed. Workers shared assignments or pass off to another member of the team if the work load was too much for one. According to Raziq and Maulabakhsh, (2015) employees were a definitive factor in supporting the mission and vision of the organization. The ability to provide support and continue on with the mission through team collaboration was beneficial to the overall success, which can help everyone in the long term.

### ***Stress and Burnout***

P3 stated that it was not fair to bring the office into the employees' personal space, and from a unique perspective, "it was not ok to mix the business and personal and blur the lines" P3 stated that these types of actions have led to stress and burnout. Huber, (2014) mentioned the effects of job burnout when work-life challenges and stressors enter into employees' personal space, creating behavioral and health related issues. The culture associated with C3 listed the welcoming of constructive feedback to arrive at solutions that result in customer satisfaction. However, as P3 stated, it was vital to ensure that workers strive and are productive while enjoying a work-life balance environment. The organization had implemented several corporate social programs with targeted initiatives that reach out to local communities to support the society in which workers live.

### ***Policy Programs***

Kelly (2018) discussed the significance of policy programs that managers implemented that create work-life balance rather than work-life conflict as a valuable asset in reducing employee turnover. Customers and employees were served with courtesy, dignity and managers recognize the impact actions have on economic development and quality of life in the community, now and in the future. In addition to competitive base salaries, all five companies offered benefits packages that included

- 401(k) plan and profit participation for eligible members;
- comprehensive insurance plans that included medical, dental, and vision for PT/FT employees;
- generous holidays, vacation, and sick leave plans,

- eligibility to participate in Share Purchase Plan (SPP) in which the company matched dollar-for-dollar contributions made by eligible employees for their job category;
- back-up childcare;
- member assistance programs;
- a 529 college savings program;
- personal financial management tools;
- health and management assistance tools and incentive programs;
- concierge services;
- out-of-country emergency coverage in all countries of employment;
- pet insurance; and
- one-on-one self-improvement seminars.

Sukriket, (2015) stated the importance of business managers continuously offering outlets for employees' peace of mind. Looked over the benefits which the five companies offered to workers, several of the programs provided support and offered peace of mind which helped in create a harmonious work-life balance climate while it attracted potential future applicants.

### ***Roles and Responsibilities***

The organizational documents that I reviewed from C1, C3, and C5 included the roles and responsibilities which managers expect from employees and also described the “collaborative efforts between teams.” I used participants responses to the interview questions along with company publicly available documents to support the use of two

separate data sources for methodological triangulation. A quick review of P1 business records boasts that employees follow their passion and they lead a movement. Reviewing records from C1, I found that the organization listed the value of the employees, and descriptions of employees who solved some of the world's hardest problems, while improving quality of life for people everywhere.

### ***Diverse and Inclusive Environment***

Information collected from the website addressed the organization fostering a diverse environment committed to accommodating workers' needs. I reviewed documents from C1, C2, and C3 as I reviewed the field notes from P1, P2, and P3, and I observed a similar nature of creating a workforce which was diverse and inclusive and a fair representation of the local economy. All five companies listed their equal opportunity initiatives and provided job descriptions and a breakdown of the company efforts to give back to the community. When managers are able to address psychological needs of their employees, workers attain fulfillment (Maslow, 1943). Table 3 shows the frequency of words in participant responses and the corresponding theme. The words are in rank order.

**Table 3***Word Frequency Among Participants*

Sort result by:	Word	Frequency	Weight	Theme	
1	work	47	0.357	Work Life Balance	
2	employees	77	0.997	Work Life Balance	
3	time	64	0.384	Work Life Balance	
4	strategy	32	0.236	Flexibility	
5	team work	28	0.174	Communication	
6	interview	26	0.133	Communication	
7	manager	19	0.126	Work Life Balance	
8	worker	17	0.224	Work Life Balance	
9	work life balance	15	0.457	Work Life Balance	
10	flexibility	11	0.131	Flexibility	
11	accuracy	9	0.136	Flexibility	
12	burnout	8	0.129	Work Life Balance	
13	possible member check	5	0.457	Work Life Balance	
14	later data interpretation	5	0.457	Flexibility	
15	Vacation Time	5	0.305	Work Life Balance	
16	consent form	5	0.305	Communication	
17	personal time	5	0.244	Job Satisfaction	
18	transcribed note	18	0.122	Communication	
19	personal life	4	0.244	Work Life Balance	
20	business manager	4	0.183	Work Life Balance	
21	work phone	4	0.183	Communication	
22	additional strategy	4	0.183	Flexibility	
23	communication	3	0.274	Communication	
24	Starbucks Gift Card	2	0.274	Job Satisfaction	
25	important things	3	0.183	Work Life Balance	
26	different area	3	0.183	Flexibility	
27	personal phone	3	0.183	Job Satisfaction	
28	happy employees	3	0.183	Job Satisfaction	
29	team member	3	0.122	Work Life Balance	
30	review process	3	0.122	Job Satisfaction	

There are also initiatives to support worker health and well-being. P3 is supportive of workers taking personal time to avoid “a downward trajectory.” P3, explained, being a peer prior to becoming a manager, did help with workers sharing, and speaking up when issues arose. Sometimes workers simply took a mental health day. It was another strategy, in place that helped create balance. P3 stated workers gave a 24hr notice to take a mental health day, however; it was an effective strategy. This strategy was effective according to P3, due to the output from employees increasing and the employee was no longer stressed. Herzberg (1966) identified working conditions was a hygiene factor, which tied back into answering the overarching question of strategies business managers could use to create work-life balance.

P3, commented, “I don’t want my employees going through the same things I experienced in their shoes, which was why “I created the off the floor policy,” P3 acknowledged that the focus cannot solely be on work and getting the job completed. P3 placed emphasis on acknowledging the employee behind the work and although there was a need to get the organizational work completed. Workers need a manager who can focus on a happy employee rather than the company sometimes. P3 stated that it was like a circular situation, in which “a happy person will bring about happy results, and then there will be a good output.” In the current climate, P3 stated that there were not many, if any employee-focused industries, even in C3, even though the employee was the foundation. P3 ended with stating that “happy employees produce better output, and that was the bottom-line.”

*Employee Company Website*

P2 commented about brochures and flyers which were distributed to workers from C2, which placed focus on work-life initiatives and programs that offered support to employees to help alleviate stress. P2 stated that the organization had training and online seminars that focused on asking for ideas and concepts that workers may have. P2 suggested that workers had to understand and know that it was okay for them to take vacation time and relax. P2 stated, "We pride ourselves in not taking vacation time, as Americans we simply don't do it, which basically invites ourselves to become overworked. In the I.T. sector we can work remotely and often do work remotely or from anywhere, which was why many entered into this field and yet it seems like we do not try to take "time off". P1, P2 and P3 mentioned that employees have a hesitancy with taking needed time off to relax and focus on family time at times and then may not perform as expected or necessary to produce quality desired output/results.

All three participants pointed out initiatives that were available from their respective organizations that offered support. I reviewed the websites of P1, P2, and P3. I found that managers offered several support options for work-life balance and health and wellness. Many of the options were on flyers and brochures, which C1 and C2 had placed in break rooms, and in many open areas of the organization, whereas C3 had on the company website and in emails to workers. All five participants stated that strategies currently in place to attain work-life balance among workers, appeared to help in retention of skilled employees, and positive feedback was one way of assessing the success of this strategy. P3 stated an additional value that C3 offered to employees was

offered internal postings, “Our ability to promote from within and post internal applicants only, allows a higher retention rate, and showed our support and goal of making a positive impact.” The company websites of all five participants, confirmed that there were multiple opportunities for existing employees to receive promotions prior to onboarding of future applicants. Applicants found information on hiring practices and several internal incentives, as they reviewed the mission statement and the facts about the organization prior to making the decision to proceed with the application process. The participants also acknowledged that current and future applicants were provided the opportunity to leverage computer knowledge and analytical skills, internal websites offered modules to upgrade knowledge and training. This finding confirmed the research of Lee et al., (2017) in which employers must setup contingency plans to retain skilled employees and look for ways to keep their workers engaged. There were several references on C3 and C2 that addressed the unique problem-solver techniques which were encouraged. With statements from managers of making a difference by tackling difficult technical challenges for our clients while working in a highly collaborative environment in which each member was valued, respected, and encouraged to solve problems in their own unique way

## **Theme 2: Communication**

Creating an organization that embodies clear communication, was essential to gaining employees trust and their ease at telling you when they were having a bad day. According to Participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5) all discussed the manner in which they address, acknowledge, and supported their workers as an effective strategy. This second



theme highlights how critical communication was in various aspects of each organization. Communication also tied into hygiene factors which Herzberg, (1966, 2003,) stated included (a) company policies and administration, (b) relationship with supervisors, (c) interpersonal relations, (d) working conditions, and salary.

P1 started the discussion, with discussing innovation, trust and during the onboarding process, as opportunities managers used to solicit feedback and talking to current and potential employees. P1 and I met via Microsoft teams as requested, after completion of the consent form. According to Yin (2018b), allowing participants to use their live environment can garner a more relaxed, forthcoming answer. P1 discussed some of the downfalls of communication, where a potential employee may interview, very well, and say all the right things to gain employment, yet enter the workplace and stain the workplace environment. It was in those moments that P1 stated, you think to yourself, “I want the person who interviewed for this position, that said all the right things to get in the door, I want that person back.” WLB impacts work and employees. P1 pointed out that it was vital to lead by example, and P1 has a work phone and a personal phone; P1 clearly stated, employees did not have my personal phone number, and I do not expect to have theirs. P1 said, if I were to give my personal number and take calls at all times of the day and night, they would think it’s ok, and this was not ok; therefore, I need not set that expectation of it being ok. P1 clearly stated that employees are not expected to answer work calls when they are off the clock.

Communication was echoed across all participants (P1, P2, P3, P4 and, P5), who each accounted for their daily interactions with their workers. P2 sounded relaxed and

ready to assist with the study. According to Yin (2018b), participants should answer the same set of predetermined questions to conduct a valid qualitative case study. P2, P3, and P4, all accounted for communication as a central part of the employee-employer relationship. P3 believed that communication in the team was also important when workers appeared to be stressed or burned out. It was in those moments when outputting of data slowed down and the worker appeared burned out that P3 engaged in one-on-one talks. "I simply ask, "How do you feel?" "What would make you less burned out?"

### ***Employee-Employer Relationship***

Communication was key, it may require that P3 add an extra person to handle some of the workload or tell the employee to put the work down for a while. Implementing the "off the floor" policy according to P3 was effective in bringing about better outputs and better quality of work from employees. P3, assessed that the relationship between manager and employee helped to establish open communication, which was honest and forthright. All five participants discussed the need to provide a supportive platform where workers feel listened too, and share a positive employee-employer relationship. Maintaining a supportive worksite where employees feel comfortable and can approach management in a manner where they voice concerns and where areas can improve are essential in providing a warm, inviting work climate.

According to documents provided online from P2, P3, and P5, there were online tools offered from their organizations which provided seminars on effective communication, and self-help training that anyone can use within the organization which all have received positive feedback from workers. Each manager shared experiences of

the positive effects that have helped contribute to an amicable employee-employer bond. Listed on all three online websites from C2, C3, and C5 were positive statements related to virtual trustworthy relationships that addressed a caring attitude towards workers addressing e-ethics and e-leadership while also addressing stakeholder relationships.

P2 found that a lack in communicating the need to take leave, showed negative effects of not speaking up. P2 stated, "It is hard taking your own medicine when it comes to taking leave, as I am looking out for others more than I look out for myself and often fail to take leave myself." Participant 2 stated that someone had to advocate when you are off-limits. It also meant not taking the after-work calls, and not expecting employees to take calls. The example must be set and by doing so, you are letting workers know that you value their personal time, which will assist in their having a healthy productive work life. Communicating their wellbeing was important and you care, P2 stated it was vital, if not there could be a reckoning period where everything had to reset and that may have a bad effect on everything. As a sidenote P2, also acknowledged "I also recognize that I do not necessarily subscribe to the things that I advocate for my workers, and I have to understand that when I am off, I need to be off as well".

As I collected the data from the participants, all participants shared a common theme in terms of communication with their employees, that centered around clear communication, open and honest communication, and timely communication of things that were important from an organizational standpoint as well as from the employees' personal time. Communication was important in understanding what was important from both the employee and the employer viewpoint. Yang et al., (2016) stated positive effects

of employers who articulated and provided were employees with clear expectations, which help in reduced costs for replacing skilled workers. Yang et al., (2016) discussed the value which HR managers placed on skilled worker retention and the estimated cost-to-hire, as a deterring factor. Future researchers may discover that effective communication among managers and workers was indeed a proven strategy for work-life balance and employee retention.

Communication was one area in which P3 considered the biggest effective tool in place for the strategies which were implemented, it is number 1 with the team P3 managed. According to P3, being a peer prior to becoming a manager, had greatly helped with workers sharing. "They do not have a problem, speaking up to say "I'm tired, I need a mental health day" which is an additional implemented strategy at the workers' disposal. P3 stated, "you can hear it in their voice, when they are stressed" The employees also have no qualms about letting P3 know they are tired, due to the employee-employer relationship. P3 stated,

Sometimes it may take my doing some data pulling, to see where they are at. It is in those moments that I have to check in on the employee and I may ask, "what's going on?" How can I help? I may have to assess the workload and make a judgement call.

P3 also stated that having worked in employees' shoes, there is a deeper understanding as to what is going on with the employee. It was also beneficial due to a lack of communication from P3 outside of work. Having the knowledge and skillsets of the workers under P3, is one of the things which P3 stated, "gives me the ability to see

where there are errors and, in those times, P3 can guide and help, and gauge, who needs what?" It is also an area where P3 stated,

"I had no patience outside of the job, I was angry, I was ill, and I was burned out, I didn't even want anyone to talk to me outside of work." I left everything at the job, so when I stopped work, I really didn't want to talk and I didn't want to be bothered, I was just better at working P3 stated, I do not want my employees to go through those same things, which is why I created these strategies.

P4 and P5 both discussed effective communication and employee engagement as one of the positive attributes they equated to the weekly group meetings or the one-on-one feedback sessions in which employees can voice their thoughts, opinions, likes, dislikes and any other areas of concerns which may arise. P5 also stated that regular feedback with direct reports and those who fall under the direct reports help with achieving goals. By creating a safe space within the boundaries of H.R. of course, P4 stated that the first 30 minutes of each weekly staff meeting in the workday is a round room conversation with staff, sharing and opening up of things that have nothing to do with work. This strategy of opening up and sharing is an ice breaker, and during these times, one can talk about anything in their daily lives, which they feel comfortable. It was also an opportunity to lend support, and there has been positive feedback with things shared, P4 believes that it has helped employees on multiple levels and shares a caring factor.

Al-Emadi et al., (2015) stated that managers reaped the rewards from sharing and engaging employees to provide training resources and initiatives that spark growth. P4

said it was in these meetings that staff talked about what was going on in their daily lives and things they may want to share. Brett et al., (2014) discussed the benefits managers attained in both their communities and the organization they serviced when employees showed job satisfaction. This theme was relatable to Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory's conceptual framework and tied into the central research question. P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 all shared effective communication across all five organizations as a shared value that each participant articulated as a positive attribute that reduced employee turnover rates and allowed collaboration.

P4 emphasized creating a warm ecosystem for the teams open, honest, and comfortable habitat. Due to the nature of on-call and extended work days or nights, P4 voiced the need to create a warm ecosystem and transparency. Often, work lives cross-pollinated with personal lives within the I.T. field, and P4 believed that the team's transparency and comfort level had worked wonders. With the extension of hours, on-call statuses, making calls, and working hours outside of the typical workday due to European or Pacific counterparts, it was crucial to have a forthcoming team.

Another specific action that P4 shared went hand in hand with effective communication in the assessment of how implemented strategies work. P4 stated that when evaluating the effectiveness of the "touchpoint" meetings with each team member. There were monthly check-ins with employees, and although there are not specific, "how do you feel type meetings or "Do you feel comfortable sharing Q & A's" P4 takes time out every month and had a check-in. P4 asked employees how they felt meetings were benefitting. These opportunities created actions to verbalize, share, and interact with

others on the team. P4 stated, "I also ask do they feel compelled to share?" for a few reasons.

According to P4, when you have a one-on-one meeting with an I.T. specialist with particular specialties, with whom you want to collaborate with other team members, sometimes they can get siloed. Still, you want to make room for their suggestions/feedback. The cross-collaboration with fellow team members brought out the real synergy. Once you got true collaboration, there was a synergy effect, and then in our monthly cadence, you got buy-in where everyone enjoyed and listened. So, the touchpoints allowed for a sort of how do you feel the moment. P4 stated several strategic planning initiatives; P4 spearheaded about three major strategic planning events. Still, in a few, there has had to be ice breakers of "Starbucks gift cards" offered to get workers to open up, with H.R. knowledge and approval. P4 started, the "Ifs" that was what we called the strategy "Ifs?" P4 stated,

If I were to offer you this "Starbucks gift card," then the room opened up more; I guess a Starbucks gift card will get anybody to at least give a soundbite or two (P4). As a leader, I would typically go first because you should lead by example as a leader.

P4 then opened up the dialogue, which would then at least allow others in the room to get comfortable with sharing. Harmony and communication were key aspects in making it all work. They also had H.R. buy-in and consent forms from the team concerning their sharing of information to maintain compliance issues. The key to the strategy was that there was healthy open communication flowing. When it was time to

transition from the office to strictly remote due to Covid-19, P4 stated we had already broken the ice, which was a tremendous asset to the team. P4 said that working from personal spaces and bringing the office into home life had its challenges, but it was also a blessing for some to show the tremendous assets of I.T. specialists. P4 was also conducting some anonymous surveys with the team to solicit feedback, and their reviews were ongoing at the moment.

As for P5, there were several references to communication as a tool that both managers and employees must use to get to those areas of work and personal life that were important and essential to all parties' peace of mind. Specifically, P5 stated it was necessary to get regular feedback. From a director's perspective, checking in regularly with employees to ensure they felt adequately supported in their personal choices was essential. P5 eluded individual decisions that someone made can be challenging or come off the wrong way, depending on how communicated. However, from the viewpoint of P5, not everybody shared the same philosophy; therefore, when you join a new organization or even just working with colleagues, you have known for many years if you do not have the same work ethics or perspective. Communication may be scarce or not effective at all. According to Daim et al., (2012); and Duranti and de Almeida, (2012), although virtual communication was on the rise due to the nature of global stakeholders, and varying cultures, there also arose misunderstandings, and knowledge sharing and decision-making processes may encounter issues, of distress or conflicts.

P5 stated that not only from a general orientation standpoint but also from the same personal responsibilities, issues might arise. Whether it be family, personal pursuits,



finances, hobbies, or family-related or health-related problems, they may not understand how important something was to you. P5 paused and stated,

we both know that there are folks who work to live, and personally, P5 said, "I am not one of those persons." If you were to pair me up with that type of person, and I tell them, "I want to cut out early because I want to go to my daughter's dance recital, or I want to play nine rounds of golf before it gets dark, there could be challenges. Therefore, one of the main challenges was that people have different perspectives, and getting folks to understand and respect yours can be challenging.

Although challenges may creep up in the way employees communicated their needs, P5 also addressed the responsibilities of maintaining output and productivity despite managing WLB (work-life balance). P5 also said though some people might see our actions as inappropriate or misplaced; however, the proof is in the pudding, right? During those times, P5 said, I can say. "Hey, this is how we do things here on my team, and look at the results." Then that serves to mitigate the concerns of colleagues, who may think otherwise. When output was quantified, data supported taking the route of listening to employees and offering support based on communication. P5 had the data and the metrics regarding productivity to substantiate the strategies in place for work-life balance. There were actual numbers to support the actions taken, and it was more than just subjective information. It was not just anecdotal information; it was working. P5 stated the environment created was one where it was safe to have conversations where

managers did not have to feel as though they were coming off as questioning how and where the employee was spending their free personal time.

### **Theme 3: Flexibility**

Flexibility in the workplace repeated from Participants P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5, who all stated that flexibility between managers' who maintained positive work-life balance strategies with employees positively affects the output received. P1, P2, P3, and P4 all described flexibility in workers, whether it be adjusting time, adjusting work locations, or merely adapting to the everchanging work environment, each manager provided details on the benefits of workers willing to adapt to the changes that come with telework. The research which I cited supports the conceptual framework as it relates to work-life balance and Herzberg's hygiene-motivational theory. Participants continuously referenced flexibility in their style of dealing with employees in general and their willingness to allow workers latitude with their schedules, work habits, and overall ability to get the job done. P1 discussed allowing workers time to handle those unexpected things that arose, such as a flat tire or working remotely if that would allow the most flexibility. P1 addressed flexibility from the standpoint of workers coming to the office or taking office on vacation with them if it could provide the flexibility to enjoy "me" time which it was essential to the workers' well-being. In maintaining flexibility with work/life balance issues, P1 provided examples such as adjusting times to 8am to 6 pm if that time would be a lot easier for keeping a good employee; the flexibility with scheduling allowed the employee to stay happy and able to work and be innovative. As I collected

my field notes, I addressed prior data of researchers on flexibility and telework options employees adapted to fit their needs.

### ***Benefits and Incentives***

P1 discussed strategies that those who chose to work from the home center around health and wellness goals and how C1 allows employees to set wellness goals as incentives towards work benefits. The focus centered around allowing workers time to work out at gyms and facilities on-site or from the comfort of their home as long as they set the goal, accomplish the plan, and understand that management supports them. According to Arekar et al. (2016), high motivation was essential to workers; P1 provided encouraging motivating factors in answers to the research questions and explained why flexibility was necessary. P1 provided the importance of some workers working remotely during a local recent lousy weather event that proved beneficial to the organization. The employee was able to conduct the work which those on-site could not accomplish. Basit (2017) stated, when employers allow workers to work from alternative locations or maintain a flexible schedule for efficiency, they may also attribute to the employee performing well on the job. P1 shared that the main strategies of C1 are:

“managers use flexibility and we share and listen to concerns which could affect productivity, by addressing issues helps everyone.” P1 also stated that implementing telework opportunities or working offsite at other locations helps employees who need to work outside regular traditional hours.

P2 alluded that once employees had permission to flex their schedules and use vacation time, there was a definite uptick in employees taking time off. “By reducing

employees' stress levels and letting them know that "everything does not need an immediate response," having flexibility helps in getting the job accomplished. P2 responded that some work-life balance strategies required letting employees know that they can and should take vacation time. According to P2,

"we pride ourselves in not taking vacation time; as Americans, we simply don't do it, which invites ourselves to become overworked." In the I.T. sector, we can work remotely and often do work remotely or anywhere, which is why many enter into this field, and yet it seems like we do not try to take "time off." From the support side, we are not in it for profitability, as we help fix problems that others have that can hurt productivity.

So, according to P2, "I would have to say vacation time is a big deal along with flexibility." P2 also acknowledged that "It was hard to judge from qualitative analysis regarding the effectiveness this strategy provided, although welcomed and appreciated. P2 believes that from a quantitative perspective, there was an uptick in time off from a metrics perspective, with employees taking a vacation immediately, even if not for the entire day.

P2 stated that pre-Covid-19, the IT department in general, was using flex time and could also work offsite or even longer days or hours as it was customary for them to offer support from different locations or even remotely. Some of those who worked in other departments were not happy, not happy that they did not receive the same latitude, so it could be challenging, especially for those who could not telecommute but were required to be on-site before the pandemic. According to P2

From my perspective, our local ability to flex as far as working more hours, four days a week, from home, department by department, was good for some but presented challenges for others. Working in I.T., telecommuting allows those in our department and area to be more flexible; however, it was difficult and a key challenge in other areas.

According to P2, during these changing times, the I.T. team probably gained some equity and looked at all the divisions in our department. So many people enter the I.T. field, I believe due to our level of flexibility, as far as shorter or longer workdays. Before the pandemic, other departments that were a part of the government side were not allowed to telework. With the lack of flexibility being extended to different areas, some did not embrace telework from home. However, P2 thought it was hard to assess from a person-to-person analysis. I asked P2 about challenges encountered with telework and the flexibility to work offsite, as far as any issues. P2 stated,

“As for me, it was not a challenge in our area as we were using flextime and telecommuting before the current situation. As we were accustomed to working remotely and telecommuting, we were probably more flexible with adjusted our hours to get our work done and helping others from a different department.”

Allowing staff to set priorities, not develop their preferences as to what is most important as far as the assignments from a higher level, but provide them with assignments with due dates to allow some additional flexibility with their work.

As some were not happy or embracing more extended workdays, it was also crucial that P2 advocated “for my staff to set priorities” and allowed staff to be flexible.

These actions also meant that P2 set timelines for project completion. Staff was encouraged to complete their work without the need for P2 to follow up or micromanage. P2 stated, “I would check in to see if they required my help with anything, but I was checking in to see if they needed anything. I was advocating for them for their vacation time and for work-life balance, which helped address healthy leave.”

As an IT manager who works in support, P2 can work long workdays and take longer work time off. Those who could not utilize flextime and allocate time off for vacations may have had challenges, mostly since they were not customary to work remotely or have the same kind of flexibility. An additional strategy, which P2 shared as effective, was not micromanaging the team by allowing them to get an assignment completed on time on their own with a set deadline. By enabling workers to be flexible and fully embrace staff confidence, they adjusted their day, hours, or workday to complete any job without having P2 follow-up or micromanage their assignment.

If P2 follows-up, it was only to see if they need anything from P2 and if I can help them in any way, not necessarily to know of completion yet, but to ensure that they knew they have P2 as an additional resource. As a manager, P2 provided reassurance of availability to help and willingness to help. P2 stated it was to reconfirm that, as the IT manager, P2 was there for them. “By checking in on them to see if they have a good

balance between their professional and personal life, I also showed I care and that their health is important.”

Goh et al. (2015) discussed the importance of supervisor work and family life roles and the effects that such support provided employees. P2 checked on employees' well-being to protect a valuable asset for the organization and the department. Skilled I.T. employees were an essential part of the organization, and their overall health and well-being were critical for most infrastructures. P3 contributed flexibility in the workplace, similar to P1 and P2, stated that there are so many different available options to workers in the IT field due to the latitude to work from anywhere. P3 also took a more robust strategy to ensure that employees flexed their work and personal time.

P3 found employees stressed and burned out quickly, so, therefore, P3 stressed on their lunch break, and at the end of their shift, all employees are off the floor at a particular time. P3 stated that it was very easy for 5:00 pm to turn into 7:30 pm with some employees trying to finish a specific project. To the point that some folks were walked off the floor. P3 stated, "I find that I have to force my employees off the floor at the end of the shift by telling them "work will be here" some feel they had to finish everything before they left, but to maintain a healthy work-home life, they had to unplug. P3 stated that two hours before their shift ended with pay once a week, two people were forced to rotate to go home early. P3 worked late once a week so that the employees received compensation and enjoyed their time. It was a strategy that P3 stated would had been great during P3's tenure before becoming a manager. P3 also shared that it would had been nice for a manager to took the same kind of initiative when P3 was in the

workers' position. Having the ability to unplug and put the work down to reduce stress was vital in an operation where the employees are looked upon to handle critical documentation and inputting. Managers who used effective communication while engaging employees had less overall voluntary employee turnover and gained valuable feedback on job satisfaction from workers (P2, P3, and P5). Mehrzi and Singh (2016) documented positives attributed to effective communication, such as reduced employee turnover and job satisfaction of employees.

#### **Theme 4: Job Satisfaction**

The fourth theme identified from the study was job satisfaction. All five participants articulated the importance job satisfaction had on the effectiveness of the work employees conducted. The findings were consistent with Herzberg's (1966) motivation-hygiene theory that identified the significance of employees working conditions and their motivation to work. The findings also provided answers to the overarching research question of "What strategies did IT business managers of small to medium-sized enterprises develop and implement to improve the work-life balance environment?"

According to information contained on the website of C4, the goal of the organization was to create an environment where mutual respect and diversity were celebrated and embraced to provide employees with a shared vision and future. Managers who acknowledged and addressed hygiene and motivation factors in their strategies boosted employee engagement and job satisfaction. P4 stated the need to create a warm ecosystem for the teams open, honest, and comfortable. Providing workers with a



comfortable environment in which they do their job in a judgement free zone was one of the goals discussed in the strategic goals in C4. P4 discussed the challenges in balancing work life and personal life and the need to create a safe space in which employees flourished, grew and needed to know that everyone was transparent. Harwiki, (2016), discussed the potential positive effects that managers might attain in a supportive climate. Understanding that there are unhappy workers in all establishments, was inevitable, however P1, stated that it was still important to make a concerted effort to build strong relationships and support systems that create job satisfaction for the work culture.

#### ***Alignment With Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory***

According to Band et al. (2016) there were multiple intrinsic factors that Herzberg et al., (1959) processed to seek an understanding of what satisfies employees. Job satisfaction and employee engagement were two factors which tied back into the conceptual framework of the study. Herzberg et al., (1959) discussed the job content and the job context as areas that factored into satisfaction of employees. P4 used several "ice breaker" techniques with employees to provide the team with a level of transparency and comfort, which was reported to work wonders. P4 stated that several of the strategies implemented in the support side of IT started as just a direct team initiative, however after positive reactions and reports of the success, the strategies spread out to the entire technology department and was now technology-wide, almost company-wide.

Expanding strategic measures that might help the entire organization see an increase in job satisfaction was one strategy which P4 suggested could boost morale. Derby-Davis, (2014) discussed motivation-hygiene factors in job satisfaction and

employee engagement as two factors that managers might find contributed to growth and productivity. P5 discussed employees getting their jobs done, as work required completion, however; P5 also stated that it was important that employees take time off, and addressed personal needs. P5 models the behavior that was expected of employees to allow the employees to understand that their lives were important and their values of family are valued.

Herzberg et al., (1959) stated that job satisfaction was highlighted and effective in organizations which allowed feedback and employee engagement P1, P2, P3, and P5, all acknowledged that job satisfaction and understanding employees need were all essential factors in achieving employee buy-in and peace of mind. P3 stated that the employees were the foundation of any organization, and the goal should start with focusing on making a happy employee, with a happy employee who enjoyed their job, the organization reaped the rewards.

P4 stated positive aspects of providing job satisfaction among employees, as the notion of Fridays was almost free days. What that means is that in the technology field, even though mornings are when the department teams experience on call calls, migration, and system updates in many areas, Friday mornings can be set aside as just on-call time, to take care of after-hour work, or system updates. P4 stated the use of Fridays counterbalanced or offered that time as a free period, the team could take either two Friday mornings out of the month or combine them for a full Friday or take two separate Fridays where it was all free time, all company approved transitions. As P4 stated,

they don't want to say it's a free PTO (paid time off), but you transition the business meetings to a flexible schedule of M-Th now, and Fridays became a day where you reset yourself with an on-call rotation. For some in the industry that allowed the stretching of a weekend, the team also collaborated more and sometimes offered enhancements in team meetings. The team overall loved the concept; there were advantages in that before most meetings, there was data which needed compiling before the meeting could take place, and I.T. was in charge of getting the data compiled, with the "free time" there was time to get the technical things handled and in place before the meeting start.

P4 noted that PowerPoint presentations are subjective. When they are not up and working correctly, it required technical acuity, and it was in those moments that one could see the "value" of the I.T. professional. Information technology was a specialty field which has value in nearly every industry, providing job satisfaction was one perk, that all participants agreed was a cost-effective tool. With more and more workers forced to telework, some IT specialists saw more than normal demand for support and with those demands some managers were addressing different needs. As for P5, one incentive the support side of the office offered was an unrestricted PTO policy, as long as the manager approved the time, employees were able to take off. P5 had espoused this message from resources for many years, even before companies going through the current climate. Hofaidhllaoui and Chhinzer (2014), echoed a similar message, that centered around managers who looked at factors that could lead to job satisfaction and productivity.

Every participant was allotted 60 minutes of interview time to answer the overarching research question for the study. I informed each participant that I would audio record our session for accuracy and allowed the opportunity to review the responses multiple times throughout my transcribing of the interview notes. During the review process, I also reviewed company documentation for possible alignment of recurring themes and for supporting the confirmation of the participants' responses. By aligning the documentation, I provided the participant with a summary of my interview notes via email for review, I ensured that I sent the interview questions along with the corresponding answers for review. I used an interview protocol as a guide to ensure that I used a standardized process, which assisted with consistency (Yin, 2018). The goal of sending the questions along with the responses, was to allow each participant an opportunity to review and scan the transcripts for accuracy and to provide any necessary feedback on my interpretation of the interview questions. Any questions that arose during the review process, were addressed and corrected to ensure an accurate summation.

All participants shared a managerial background, some were direct HR managers and others were IT managers who I chose that can offer information on their employees' motivator and hygiene factors. Ogunnaike et al., (2017), discussed motivator and hygiene factors as two key concepts in Herzberg's motivation theory, which was a factor in the study. Each participant was asked the same six open-ended interview questions that I chose in hopes of extracting different strategies which business managers used to attain work-life balance. Participants were each provided a pseudonym to mask their identities and to further reduce revealing participants identities I sent out separate recruitment and

interview requests to multiple organizations. Additionally, I communicated with each participant separately, via email, phone, text, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams to ensure privacy. None of the participants were contacted jointly to avoid revealing anyone's identity. Each of the managers provided strategies that they have implemented in which they have garnered positive results. Lee and Sirgy, (2018) detailed the value achieved when business managers implemented strategies in which participants applied inter-life theories and achieved life satisfaction.

I used visual and audio-recordings for Participant 1 and Participant 4, in which I observed their body language and listened to their tone and mannerisms as I conducted the interviews. P3 provided some validity to Schlegel's (2017), claim that some workers who have to work remotely, find it hard separating home-life from work-life in the employees who were told to "step away" and leave the work at work, were connecting from home, outside of their work environment. P2 discussed many of the effects that were experienced when an employee suffers from burnout. Huber, (2014), acknowledged that burnout, was one of many detrimental factors that overworked employees felt, as they struggled to find work-life balance solutions. P2 shared struggles of abusive behaviors, and self-loathing of being bothered or disturbed by the outside world, when outside of work. Huber, (2014) discussed the downward spiral of burnout, when the workload, was too much or aggressive behaviors accompanied the individual's need to balance work and home life. Participant 3 acknowledged that the burdens and stressors of work affected the need to limit outside conversations and brought out negative behavior,

attributes to burnout factors described as aspects of personal and professional life, which Huber, (2014) also stated.

I used audio-recordings from a Sony digital recorder to accurately capture each participant's response in their own words. I allowed each participant the latitude to choose a day, time, and forum that was inviting and comfortable to ensure that I did not impose any undue pressures and allowed each participant to speak freely. I confirmed that each participant understood that I would implement a transcript review process in the data analysis review. I emailed each participant a summation of the interview I conducted to review as recommended by Patton (1990), who stated that participants' feedback and review contributes to acknowledging and enhancing the accuracy of interviews.

### **Overview of the Study Findings**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies used by SME IT business managers to create work-life balance which could also reduce voluntary employee turnover. Data came from semistructured phone interviews, field notes and data collected on five different organizations located in the Southeastern United States. Using a criterion-based purposeful sampling method, I ensured that managers were all currently employed at a SME, and had experience conducting hiring and exit interviews. I also asked interview questions that allowed the managers to share experiences and perceptions of voluntary employee turnover. Lastly, I interviewed managers with no less than two years' experience in the HR or IT field. I also asked managers about their organizational and worker efficiency metrics. Each participant elaborated on the effectiveness of their organizations' strategies to maintain a work-life

balance in their employees. As I analyzed the participants' data, I noticed that there were four common themes among the participants' answers about effective strategies used in obtaining work-life balance. Table 3 illustrates the number of times that participants discussed flexibility, work life balance, communication, and job satisfaction during the interview process.

Theme 1 identified the importance of work-life balance and related back to Herzberg et al., (1959) two-factor hygiene-motivation theory the results might extend future research should researchers look at strategies more in-depth. I researched five SMEs located in the Southeastern United States and found very similar themes repeated that prior researchers have also researched. The findings of this study have implications for social change, as business managers can explore PTO options, and off the floor policies, and use several of the strategies discussed as a guide for operational success. Information from my literature review aligned with information interpreted from the data. In the literature review telework options, stress, burnout and managers influences were associated with work-life balance.

### ***Recognition and Rewards***

Herzberg et al. (1959) discussed several factors which managers used to support workers and boost morale, to include recognition and rewards. Peer reviewed studies compared, Vroom, Maslow, and Herzberg's study when addressing areas of concern that managers may encounter as they establish organizational rules to focus on both satisfiers and dissatisfiers of the workforce. A quick Google search resulted in thousands of articles

on work-life balance and the need to understand the employer-employee relationship as the subject was relevant in today's society.

### ***Similar Theories***

In addition to Herzberg's theory detailing growth, recognition, and work which employees find as motivation, Maslow's Self Actualization and Self-Esteem, Alderfer's Growth need theory discussed three needs, existence, relatedness, and growth needs and McClelland's Need of Achievements, described content theory, such as; need for achievement, need for power and need for affiliation. Vroom's expectancy theory (1964), consisted of motivational items, valence, expectancy, and instrumentality. All theories presented managers with prior research on hygiene factors, detailing pay, company policies and additional factors which should be considered for work-life balance.

### ***Contrasting Theories***

Although Herzberg's two-factor theory was built on the employees' job satisfactions, there were several theorists who challenged Herzberg's theory and found the theory was less practical for today's employees. In particular, opposition of findings against whether extrinsic factors of job dissatisfaction or any feelings at all towards the job.

According to Stowell and Cooray, (2016), and Bucoveţchi et al. (2019), who contradicted Herzberg's findings, after applying the theory and concluding that overall job satisfaction was related to age and educational levels rather than intrinsic and extrinsic factors and there were further contradictions across multiple groups. Herzberg's theory aligned more with Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory overall. In the analysis of



Theme 2, all participants agreed to the importance of communication in the workplace as a vital tool that everyone must use clearly and effectively at work and home. Researchers of existing literature listed effective communication and open communication as two actions that support reductions in employee turnover. Amzat et al. (2017) discussed the use of open communication to establish what motivates and satisfies workers.

Prior research from Kwiatkowski (2019), also addressed the importance of communication as an essential skillset. Kwiatkowski (2019), addressed three main areas in the communication process (a) active listening; (b) getting across a message clearly and vividly; and (c) providing performance feedback in a supportive manner. It was reflected in several prior articles on effective communication and the benefits of such measures in place to include; Band et al. (2016) who addressed understanding the needs of employees and other communication competencies, which may help in creating work-life balance.

Theme 3 allowed managers to provide employees with several options as they perform their jobs, whether it involved telecommuting, or adjusted of hours to accommodate varying needs of the worker or the organization while still maintaining a flexible policy. Bae and Goodman (2014) discussed employee retention of those employers who offered employees flexible work opportunities as well as family-friendly policies, versus organizational policies, that did not offer any flexible options. Azar (2017) provided data which showed flexible work arrangements reduced workforce costs by approximately 13%. Prior research also showed supporting numbers of 3% to 7% savings for some organizations where managers allowed flexibility in staff hours and

locations. Theme 4 showed the lowest frequency amongst P1, P2, P3, P4 and P5 as job satisfaction was a limited used term among the participants, however; all five participants discussed the value of a happy employee in the work place. Table 4 lists the occurrences of themes from all five participants, with P3 and P5 discussing all four themes. All five participants discussed employee demeanor and strategies to create work life balance to maintain a healthy positive work environment, which all wanted to show job satisfaction. According to prior research there were employees who suffered from stress, or burnout on the job, who experienced a lack of job satisfaction (Flynn & Ironside, 2018).

**Table 4**

*Emerging Themes*

Themes	Number of participants	Frequency
Work-life balance	5	271
Communication	5	84
Flexibility	5	64
Job satisfaction	5	16
Total		435

Table 5 displays the occurrence of themes across participants on work-life balance. All five participants discussed strategies and the effect that the strategies have on personal and work life. Participant 2 and Participant 4 did not elaborate on flexibility in

their interview, although there were alternative work arrangements, such as parttime applications and telework options listed on their job opportunities site.

**Table 5**

*Number of Responses for Each Theme by Participant*

Participant no.	Work-life balance	Flexibility	Communication	Job satisfaction
P1	1	1		1
P2	1		1	1
P3	1	1	1	1
P4	1		1	
P5	1	1	1	1

*Note.* The numeral 1 indicates that the participant indicated this theme in their interview

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

The research conducted in this study added value to those seeking strategies that some IT business managers have found beneficial in maintaining a work-life balance environment. The research was meaningful to the professional practice of business due to documented strategies that some IT business managers implemented which supported productivity, output and created positive outcomes. The results were relevant to improved business practices due to strategies implemented (a) created new business models/projects, (b) reduced overall stress in work/life balance, (c) improved utilization and cognitive connectedness, (d) reduced operational issues, (e) positive feelings of connectedness in virtual environments, and according to Shin (2010) and Boyd and

Ellison, (2007) the means of interacting with others by remote means added a strong sense of co-presence and other positive attributes. The information contained in the study provided evaluative framework business managers may choose to use specifically directed at IT professionals who work remotely, virtually, or in an environment seeking to create work-life balance.

### **Implications for Social Change**

This study had implications for social change, due to managers from any industry can use the results of the data collected for improvement to their current policies. Organizations and managers have a vested interest in their employees and several of the strategies used have helped in reducing voluntary turnover and creating a work-life balance culture. The average annual turnover rate reaches nearly 19 percent which includes both voluntary and involuntary turnover. IT organizations currently average turnover rate at 20.9 percent the fourth highest in organizations and communities. Kim (2012), debated the high costs organizations incur due to the loss of talented employees, emphasizing the need to implement HRM practices and strategies to support employee retention. The study findings led to the following detailed strategies, which some HR and IT business managers have found beneficial in maintaining a work-life balance environment and employee retention. Flexible work arrangements have allowed many employees to accomplish work and personal connections that have positive outcomes and acceptable productivity levels.

According to Shin (2010), online service providers faced challenges with creating an environment that promotes easy interaction and fun. Participants 1 through 5 provided

strategies and ideas that they implemented, which focused on transparency which P5, mentioned on more than one occasion. P1 stated that for those employees who have gotten out of bed and not gotten dressed for the day, not having a camera directly on the employee had made a difference in just being available and offering assistance as needed. P1 provided the ability to instill positive strategies as encouraging those who may be unhappy in the environment, who can help produce a less stressful environment at work. P1 provided actions that can support employees and spillover from the work climate into society, creating positivity in individuals, communities, organizations, institutions, cultures, or societies, affecting social change/behavior.

### **Recommendations for Action**

Recommendations that I believe business managers should implement, based on the findings from this study consist of existing creative business strategies which were successfully working (a) employee-employer non-work huddles, (b) off the floor policy, (c) health-wellness goals with incentives for success, (d) Reduced late staff meetings after 16:30 before weekends, (e) Flexibility in scheduling, (f) telework options (g) Mental health days as feasible. However, some of the options may not work; however, many supplied were options or opportunities to help others looking for creativity and proven strategies for success.

There were many emerging themes collected from the targeted population of business managers; various managers from other businesses could continue to improve on the options provided and create a continuous strategic planning model that updates with market changes or with climate changes. Recommendations from this study were

relevant to IT business managers and Human Resource managers who should pay attention to creating work-life balance and reducing voluntary employee turnover. From a business perspective, the summation of findings presented a workforce that engaged employees, allows effective communication and welcomed feedback while soliciting creativity and ideas for improvement. The information might be disseminated in trade articles or publicly available documents, which provide documented data that others can view, review, and potentially expand. I plan to publish the study via ProQuest and also share it with several local businesses in my area. I want future students, researchers, and IT business managers to use the open-access forum to gain valuable tools that can assist in research and in business. I will reach out to as many platforms that are available to share the information which I have attained. I also recommend that business managers reach out to others in their organization for advice or potential options that work that may not have been disclosed in this study.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The study limitation included a limited number of participants from the Southeastern United States. Participants who agreed to participate did not all turn back in their consent forms from the geographical area. The study was limited due to several organizations, no longer in business, due to the current epidemic. In the future researchers, may have the opportunity to elicit businesses face-to-face again to make a connection, and build a rapport. In the future, participants from different levels of the organization, may contribute to present a better overall viewpoint. Limitations of online,

via email, Skype, Zoom, Microsoft meetings, and other non-contact meetings, limited the number of observable actions.

Further research may contain additional company data on turnover and exit interviews of those who did not stay despite the successful strategies. I conducted the study on multiple SMEs; however, future researchers can focus on a single case study and create dialogue and interview questions that introduce more internal documentation from employee-focused organizations. It may be valuable to future research if the participants' pool was from a larger geographical area and was not limited to IT managers and HR managers.

Although I did not use a mixed methods or quantitative research study method future researchers may find that these methods benefit managers after data is collected and analyzed. Either method can offer a different perspective that is useful and beneficial. Although I was able to ask open-ended research questions from five IT/HR managers researchers may find others in the organization that have initiatives or strategic planning measures which can create employee growth, and retention as well as work-life balance.

### **Reflections**

This doctoral study was more overwhelming than I ever thought it would or could be for me. I imagined it so very; differently; I made plans of how the process would flow and all the things that I would do to make it happen. In actuality, it was grilling, and at times very lonely, and scary. I was scared to ask questions initially for fear of someone thinking I did not belong, and then I felt like I could not follow along or “map to the rubric,” which is a phrase I grew tired of but now understand. I discovered so much about

myself and the topic that I chose to study, and along the way, I became a good researcher. I learned terms and concepts that I never even dreamed of before this challenge, and I developed a wealth of research knowledge that will help me in future endeavors. The challenges and hurdles did not break me or define me, and I am so grateful to have, reached this goal after such a long time. I am sad that my Paternal grandmother Mildred Clara Austin did not live to see “her baby” become a doctor, however, I know that she is looking down on this proposal with tears of joy.

I have to admit the biggest biases I had going into this process, was believing that the time would not be as intensive as it has been. I did not have any idea the many revisions that this entire process would entail, nor did I understand the value of going to the residencies early in the process, many questions were answered for me after I attended Residency 2, so I wish I had taken it slightly sooner, life and work were factors that delayed the process, however, I know now that it is a valuable asset. I wish that I had known that my participant pool would not be as large, as I wanted and I believed it would be. Some businesses closed with the pandemic and others were working with skeleton crews, and could not afford to spare staffing for my study.

Covid-19 has had a negative effect on many things to include my list of potential participants’. I am thankful to the five participants’ that followed through with their commitment and engaged in the study. Now that the study is complete, I see many strategies that can potentially help some business managers with reducing turnover and with helping employees to maintain a work-life balance environment. I am grateful to have the opportunity to provide this information across a broad spectrum of resources and



I look forward to others gaining knowledge from the data I have collected and interpreted.

### **Conclusion**

The idea of providing others with potential strategies that others could use to reduce voluntary employee turnover while improving work-life balance was a concept, that I wanted to share. The managers who took time to participate during such a critical time in our history, did so with the knowledge that I wanted to help others and I wanted to share their proven strategic actions with others. The managers in the study shared several common themes, such as flexibility and communication. Managers shared actions that they implement that work, they offered effective communication techniques, to include weekly meetings, and feedback. Managers explained actions that are received positively and they also shared their concerns with burnout, stress and the end result of listening to employees and addressing situations quickly and efficiently.

Participants provided areas which required working with employees to collaborate ways that collectively allowed for work-life balance and profitability. Managers described the value they saw in creating balance in work and home for themselves and for employees. Several actions addressed the central research question and can provide future researchers with effective strategies that can be used and expanded as necessary. The results supported strategic planning measures as a benefit reducing employee turnover and creating family-friendly policies which can support a work-life balance environment. By implementing strategies which can help create a work-life balance environment, managers might promote future organizational growth,

which can spillover into creating positive social change and economic growth in local communities. Although employee turnover is inevitable, whether through attrition, resignation, firing, or job transfer, managers might decide to implement strategies listed in this study to reduce the number of workers who seek employment elsewhere. Further research might find additional strategies that are working which can add to the literature and potentially help an even larger group.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Date (xx-xx-xx xx) Time

Background of the study:

Background Information

By conducting one-on-one interviews with IT business managers, there was an opportunity to provide valuable insight to future researchers on strategies that can help to create a work-life balance environment and provide job satisfaction. Managers may find beneficial best practices that can help with reducing voluntary turnover and create a positive work-life environment, which are business issues. I asked each participant the same open-ended questions; I used the following protocol:

Voluntary Nature of the study:

As a prospective participant, your decision to voluntarily participate in the study can provide future researchers with valuable information to create work-life balance. Your decision to participate or withdraw at any time was respected and did not reflect negatively anywhere in the study. Although you have agreed to participate at this time, you have the right to withdraw with no repercussions at a future date should you change your mind.

### Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What are some work-life balance strategies you used to improve work-life balance for your employees?
2. How did you assess the effectiveness of the work-life balance strategies once implemented?
3. What key challenges did you encounter deploying these work-life balance strategies in your department?
4. How did you address these key challenges?
5. How did you assess the effectiveness of strategies implemented for challenges?
6. What additional strategies did you wish to share regarding work-life balance strategies you used to increase work-life balance for your employees?

## Appendix C: Letter of Introduction

### Invitation to Participate in Research Study

<Date>

Dear Prospective Participant,

My name is Kimberly Seymour, and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. As a graduation requirement, I must conduct interviews and collect data from IT business managers of several SMEs. Ideal participants are those who can provide valuable information from their personal experiences on work-life balance in SMEs. I would like to extend this invitation to you to participate in my research study designed to understand strategies IT business managers may use to create a work-life balance environment. Each prospective participant can withdraw from the study at any time during the research process. This consent form is a critical part of the process, and I will explain the purpose of the study for understanding before you provide your consent. The study size will consist of 5 IT business managers from 5 SMEs currently employed. I plan to meet each participant through electronic means; for example, Skype or Zoom; however, I am also available by phone or e-mail if the participant requires either choice.

You can expect several assurances if you voluntarily agree to engage and participate in the study:

- I will arrange a mutually agreed upon time to meet to conduct a Skype, Zoom or email interview
- A set time limit of 1 hour to conduct your choice of an interview at your convenience.



- I will set our meeting in a well-lit environment which is safe and inviting to ensure comfort and privacy.
- All personal information will remain confidential and will only contain non-identifiable, coded data in the study
- Accuracy, every interview will be audio recorded.
- I will provide each participant with a written transcript copy for review to ensure accuracy.
- There will be no incentives or monetary payments for participation in this study.
- Participation in this study could help benefit future research.

There is no anticipated risk for anyone who may want to withdraw from this study voluntarily. Your participation in this study is based on your criteria as an IT business manager in an SME, which may help others. If you are comfortable and agree to participate in this study, please e-mail me at Kimberly.Seymour@waldenu.edu or phone [redacted]. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to interview you and provide details for future research. Your participation is valuable and highly appreciated as I complete my study. I want to extend my deepest gratitude for allowing me the opportunity to benefit from your precious time, experiences, and contribution to my research study.

Sincerely,

Kimberly D. Seymour

Walden University doctoral candidate

## Appendix D: Participant Email Invitation

Dear Prospective Participant,

It was my pleasure to discuss the possibility of your participation in my study over the phone. As I stated in our phone conversation, my name is Kimberly D. Seymour, and I am a Walden University doctorate student. I am researching work-life balance in SMEs in the IT business industry. Attached, you will find a consent form that clearly outlines the details of the study and your participation in this research. I ask that you please take your time to thoroughly read the voluntary consent form and agreement to the terms. Should you encounter any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me to address any concerns. After you read the consent form, please reply to this e-mail by typing the words **I give voluntary consent**, if you choose to participate in this study. You may withdraw at any time with no repercussions. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Regards, Kimberly D. Seymour

Walden University doctoral candidate