2021

Employee Retention in Alabama Media Companies

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Walden University
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Abstract

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EMBA, University of Alabama, 2014

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Employee turnover comes at a high cost to businesses’ profits, operational expenses, and organizational performance and growth. The high turnover of salespeople has implications for organizational leaders in lost revenue, decreased productivity, and customer satisfaction. Grounded in leader-member exchange theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore retention strategies sales managers use to reduce the voluntary turnover of sales representatives. The participants were six sales managers who implemented successful retention strategies. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, company documents, and public documentation. The data were analyzed using Yin's 5-step data analysis method, and four themes emerged: person-organization fit, supportive work environment, effective communication, and rewards and recognition. A key recommendation is for sales leaders to provide mentors to new employees. The implications for positive social change include the potential to contribute to local communities' economic health, growth, and educational needs. Further implications for social change include stable employment to create greater prosperity for local families and communities.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to my parents, Charlie and Annye Braxton, who stood by me through life challenges and greatest joys. Although my father is no longer with us, he was and remains my loudest cheerleader. Daddy, you provided the foundation that made it possible to dream the impossible. Thank you, mom, for always challenging me to excel beyond my self-imposed limits, being my inspiration, and for your unwavering love, support, and confidence in me.

Acknowledgments

Many people played a significant role in making not only this journey possible but life in general. First and foremost, thank you to the Almighty God, for this would not have been possible without you. I want to acknowledge Dr. Aliquippa Allen for inspiring me to seek a doctorate and encouraging me to keep going when I felt like giving up. Thank you, Harry James, for patiently reading my doctoral study countless times and all the time that the study came first. Mrs. Yvonne Robinson supported, encouraged, and celebrated me from the earliest moments of my life. To my sister, Cassandra Holley, thank you for loving me and being my protector. Thank you to my nieces and nephews, my four heartbeats, Dondrea Grant, Dr. Dondra Bailey-Griggs, Braxton Holley, and Braydon Griggs. You inspire me to be better and keep growing, and you bring me great joy just being who you are. And, to my aunt Arlene Benson, my confidante and the keeper of my secrets, thank you for encouraging me always to be true to myself. Thank you to my chair, Dr. Matasha Murrelljones, for your guidance and for always being willing to answer endless questions. You have the patience of Job. Thank you to the second committee member, Dr. Jonathan Schultz, and the URR, Dr. William Stokes.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Three million people voluntarily separated from their employer during March 2016 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016), and in 2018, 41.4 million workers in the United States voluntarily left their jobs, an increase of 88% since 2010 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Over 150 million people work in U.S. businesses; however, employees continue to voluntarily quit for better opportunities (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019) expects the trend of voluntary turnover to increase through 2023 due to a thriving economy where available jobs and competition for workers are both sharply rising. But employee turnover comes at a high cost to businesses regarding profits, operational expenses, and organizational performance and growth.

Background of the Problem

For over 100 years, organizational leaders and scholars have focused on the harmful effects of voluntary turnover, indicating that it is one of the most expensive and complicated workforce challenges facing organizations (Hom et al., 2017). The persistent interest in employee voluntary turnover and retention reflects the growing recognition of the impact turnover has on organizational function (Hom et al., 2017). High employee turnover significantly increases business costs to replace talented and skilled employees (Baharin & Hanafi, 2018). The cost of losing one essential employee can range up to 200% of an employee’s salary (Cloutier et al., 2015). Knowledgeable and skilled human capital also provides a competitive advantage not easily duplicated and contributes to the long-term health of an organization (Kumar & Babu, 2017). Thus, a skilled and engaged workforce is considered the most valuable asset of any organization.

Leaders of sales organizations are especially concerned with the voluntary turnover of sales representatives due to the harmful implications such as lowered productivity, customer satisfaction, and revenue (Sunder et al., 2017). Salespeople are actively involved in the customer relationship–building process to generate revenue. In many cases, salespeople are the only point of contact between the firm and the customer (Kulik et al., 2015). Salesforce turnover could fundamentally change the nature of the customer relationship, leading to customer switching, short-term and long-term unprofitable purchase behavior (Kulik et al., 2015). When a salesperson quits, current and future customer relationships are harmed and potentially jeopardized (Rafi & Saeed, 2019). Further, the financial costs of hiring new talent include the time it takes for new salespeople to establish customer relationships and generate acceptable revenue streams (Kulik et al., 2015). Despite research on employee retention and turnover, the phenomena remain a crucial issue for corporate management (Cho & Song, 2017).

Problem Statement

Voluntary turnover of sales representatives can negatively affect an organization's human capital investment and profitability (Li et al., 2018). Company leaders spend approximately $800 billion annually incentivizing and another $15 billion in training salespeople (Sunder et al., 2017). The general business problem is that voluntary turnover of salespeople adversely affects business productivity, customer satisfaction, and revenue. The specific business problem is that some sales managers lack strategies to reduce the voluntary turnover of sales representatives.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that sales managers use to reduce the voluntary turnover of sales representatives. The target population consisted of sales managers from six media companies in Alabama who successfully used retention strategies to reduce the turnover of sales representatives. The implications for positive social change include the potential to offer sales managers retention strategies that contribute to the economic health, growth, and educational needs of local communities. Further implications for social change included stable employment to create greater prosperity for local families and communities.

Nature of the Study

I chose a qualitative methodological approach for this study to explore successful strategies sales managers use to decrease the voluntary turnover of sales representatives in media companies. A qualitative method allowed for a deeper understanding of retention strategies from those who have experience with the phenomenon (Yin, 2018). A qualitative researcher seeks to understand how social experiences are created and given meaning through an in-depth description of the phenomenon from the perspective of those involved. Conversely, quantitative research is a method used to explain phenomena according to numerical data or statistics (Yin, 2018). I eliminated a quantitative approach because determining the causes of turnover would not provide insight into participants' experiences through them describing their feelings, thoughts, or frame of reference in their own words. A mixed methodology was also not appropriate because answering the research question does not require both quantitative and qualitative data to examine and explore the strategies that sales managers use to reduce the voluntary turnover of sales representatives (see Halcomb & Hickman, 2015). The use of the qualitative method was appropriate for this study to build a holistic understanding of the strategies some sales managers use to reduce the voluntary turnover of sales representatives.

For the design, I used a multiple case study to explore in-depth strategies multiple sales managers use to reduce the voluntary turnover of sales representatives. A case study design was appropriate to answer what, how, and why questions relevant for a study on employee retention. I also considered other research designs for this study on employee turnover: grounded theory, phenomenology, and narrative. The purpose of a grounded theory design is to develop new concepts and theoretical ideas (Hemme et al., 2017), but the purpose of this research was not to develop a new theory where numerous theories already exist on employee turnover. The aim of the phenomenological approach is to understand how a specific event is experienced and given meaning (Van Manen, 2016). However, the purpose of the study was not to collect data on how salespeople or managers define their personal experiences with a phenomenon. Finally, a narrative approach provides an understanding of an event through a spoken or written text where participants give an account of an event or series of events that are chronologically connected through personal life stories (McAlpine, 2016). I did not collect personal life stories of events or actions; therefore, a narrative approach was eliminated.

Research Question

What strategies do sales managers use to reduce the voluntary turnover of sales representatives?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies have you used that have proven successful in the reduction of voluntary sales representative turnover?
2. How do you measure representative employee turnover in your organization?
3. How are strategies to reduce voluntary turnover effectively communicated to sales representatives?
4. What role does leadership play in the reduction of voluntary sales representatives' employee turnover in your organization?
5. What is your process for developing trust and respect between you and the sales representatives to increase retention?
6. What more can you add to this study regarding strategies needed to reduce voluntary sales representative employee turnover?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory. Dansereau et al. developed the LMX theory in 1973 as an alternative to the average leadership style. The average leadership style assumed that leaders display the same style with all employees in the workplace, but the LMX theory exemplifies how supervisors and subordinates relate to each other (Yang, 2020). This kind of relationship is dyadic and is developed and negotiated over time (Martin et al., 2016). A major tenet of the LMX theory relates to group members falling into two groups: the ingroup and the outgroup. Members in the out-group receive benefits outlined in the formal employment contract, where those in the in-group receive benefits that extend beyond the formal contract. As the roles of the leader and member develop, the relationship includes an exchange at every level of relationship development.

As a framework for this study, I expected that the theory's propositions would enable me to explore strategies, perceptions, and experiences regarding the LMX theory characteristics as they pertain to the retention of high-performing sales representatives. The LMX theory provided a potential lens for understanding and exploring successful retention strategies that sales managers used to reduce the voluntary turnover of sales representatives by forming high-quality relationships.

Operational Definitions

Employee retention: Employee retention is the length of time that a worker stays with an organization (Sri et al., 2016). A voluntary organizational system that encourages and motivates employees to remain with the entity for the maximum period (Al-Emadi et al., 2015).

Employee turnover: Employee turnover refers to a percentage of employees who leave an organization voluntarily or involuntarily (Rubenstein et al., 2018).

Voluntary employee turnover: Voluntary turnover is initiated by the employee when the worker chooses to terminate the employer-employee relationship (Rubenstein, et al., 2018).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions, limitations, and delimitations are essential elements of research (Canales & Caldart, 2017). The inclusion of these critical elements adds credibility to the research. The underlying assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of this study on employee retention will be described in the following sections.

Assumptions

Researchers view assumptions as true without being verified (Dutra et al., 2015). It was assumed that participants were willing to take part in the research. I also assumed that participants would answer questions completely and truthfully in a one-on-one in-depth interview. It was assumed that participants would have read and understood research requirements, questions, and terminology before taking part in an interview. Participants were guaranteed confidentiality to protect their privacy. Finally, I assumed that I would have access to company documents that serve as a second source for data collection.

Limitations

There were limitations to the qualitative multiple case study. Limitations are potential weaknesses that are beyond the researcher's control (Canales & Caldart, 2017). The research approach was chosen in hopes of gaining a deeper understanding of successful strategies media sales managers use to retain sales representatives, but there was a risk that some knowledgeable and experienced sales managers might decline to participate in the study. Participants were also in one area, Alabama, and did not include managers from other regions. Further, I was previously employed in the media industry, and unconscious bias could have been present.

Delimitations

Delimitations denote the boundaries of the research and are established by the researcher (Dutra et al., 2015). The first delimitation was the target population, which consisted of sales managers from media companies and not from other industries. The second delimitation was all participants had 3 years of experience in implementing retention strategies. Lastly, all research participants were geographically located in Alabama.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the research study for sales managers of media companies was to identify successful retention strategies that may assist in the retention of sales representatives. The study results could provide sales managers with successful strategies to reduce voluntary turnover of high-performing salespersons, thus improving business productivity, customer satisfaction, and revenue. Those with direct contact with customers are important to business leaders (Lin, 2017). The relationship between salespeople and business customers is crucial, particularly for the media industry, as most of the businesses' revenue comes from advertising sales. Customers' experience with sales representatives influences the perception of quality and satisfaction (Lin, 2017).

Further, people navigate social, political, and cultural agendas through local media outlets (Diel, 2017). By sharing relevant information, media companies support citizens' participation that enriches and improves the local community's health, finances, and education (Cappello, 2017). Therefore, successful retention strategies of sales representatives is important because media companies rely on advertising revenue to produce journalism, content, and other information (Koban et al., 2017). As people become more informed about issues that affect their daily lives, they can improve their mental and physical health as well as the financial well-being of the local community, businesses, families, and individuals.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that sales managers use to reduce the voluntary turnover of sales representatives. The literature review contains critical analysis and synthesis of seminal and contemporary peer-reviewed articles and books about employee retention, employee turnover, and successful strategies sales managers use to retain sales representatives. The literature review also includes summaries of supporting and alternative retention theories. The review also consists of the connection between the conceptual framework and successful employee retention strategies. The literature review is organized by sections to present the information in a more comprehensive manner. The first section encompasses the conceptual framework with supporting and contrasting theories. The second section contains studies that explored the causes of employee turnover and retention, such as job satisfaction, job dissatisfaction, and the relationship between leaders and followers. The third section is comprised of literature on sales representatives' turnover and consequences experienced by sales managers, such as loss of productivity, business competitiveness, lowered customer service, and revenue.

Research databases such as ABI/INFORM Global, Academic Search Premier, and Business Source Complete provided the majority of the literature pertinent to the study. While researching for the literature review, I used a multi-term approach, which delivered literature associated with employee turnover, retention, attrition, LMX, recruiting, and retaining a skilled workforce. Key search terms included *employee retention*, *employee turnover*, *job satisfaction*, *job dissatisfaction*, *exit interview*s, *leader-member exchange*, *productivity*, *business competitiveness*, *customer satisfaction*, *profits*, and *retention strategies*. I found 266 references about retention strategies that sales managers use to reduce voluntary turnover of sales representatives. The literature review consisted of 123 references, 105 or 85% of which were peer-reviewed. Eighty-six percent of the peer-reviewed journals that I used for the study had publication dates 2015 or later.

Application of the Applied Business Problem

Successful retention is vital for the organization's success, stability, growth, and revenue (Cloutier et al., 2015). The retention of sales representatives is thus a critical objective for sales organizations because salespeople contribute to the financial mission of the organization by generating revenue (Schwepker & Good, 2017). The relationship between leaders and sales representatives is an important part of retention, as leaders serve as the critical link in the organizational control system (Lam et al., 2017). Sales managers play a critical role in designing, deploying, and monitoring salesforce strategy (Lam et al., 2017). Salesforce strategy refers to decisions that determine the focus and role of the salesforce, creating customer value consistent with the firm's overall objective (Fraenkel et al., 2016). Higher satisfaction with the sales manager has led to a stronger organizational commitment from employees and customers (Jaros et al., 2017; Schwepker, 2017; Shanahan & Hopkins, 2019). Supportive leadership influences the employee's satisfaction by creating a friendly and psychologically supportive work environment and reduces the voluntary turnover of high-performing salespeople. Retention strategies and policies should evolve to consider the unique nature of the sales context (Ahmad & Saidalavi, 2018).

Previous studies have explored the retention of sales representatives, finding that LMX can positively affect sales and organizational commitment as well as influence turnover intention (Jawahar et al., 2019; Liliang, 2018; Seo et al., 2018). However, there is a lack of qualitative research on LMX, considering that LMX is a relational construct (Epitropaki & Martin, 2016), and most research on retention has not addressed the causes and leading factors of turnover (Chowdhury-Abdullah & Hasan, 2017). Though there is literature on LMX from the subordinates' perspective, little progress has been made to incorporate the leader's perspective of the quality of the LMX relationship (Cuevas, 2018). Data gathered from interviews, diaries, and observation of leaders and members could provide rich data to complement questionnaire-based empirical studies that dominate the field and provide an in-depth analysis. Therefore, I used a qualitative multiple case study and LMX as the conceptual framework to explore successful retention strategies that sales managers use to reduce the voluntary turnover of sales representatives. The findings of turnover research using the LMX conceptual framework could be applied by corporate leaders to reduce voluntary turnover of high-performing salespersons; thus, improving business productivity, customer satisfaction, and revenue.

LMX Theory

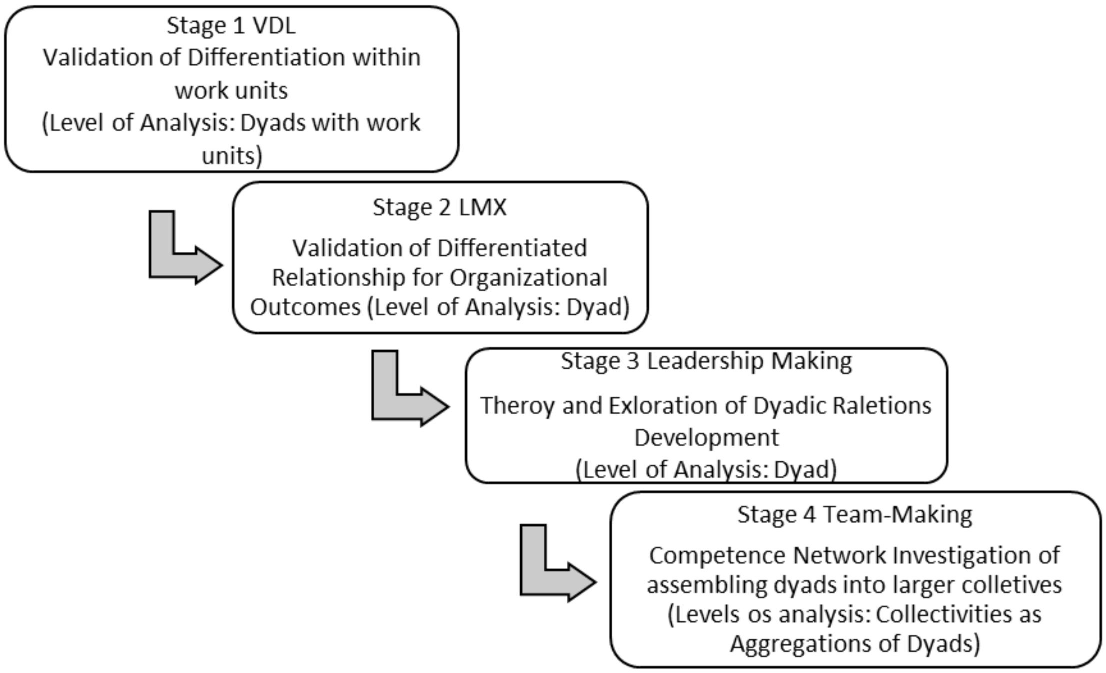
The LMX is the conceptual framework for this study on successful strategies sales managers use to reduce voluntary turnover of sales representatives. This theory was originally referred to as the vertical dyad linkage theory in 1975, which was built on the idea of average leadership style under the assumptions that employees had the same perceptions of their leader and leaders had displayed the same behaviors to all employees (Bauer & Erdogan, 2015). These concepts suggested that effective leadership occurred when leaders and followers developed mature relationships and gained access to benefits derived from the partnership (Bauer & Erdogan, 2015).

LMX also evolved from earlier theories that examined the relationship between leaders and followers as social interactions. LMX was grounded in the social exchange theory (Chernyak-Hai & Rabenu, 2018; Daspit et al., 2016), the role theory (Tsai et al., 2017), reciprocity theory (Çelen et al., 2017), and similarity-attraction theory (Jha & Jha, 2013; Mitteness et al., 2016). LMX focused on the relationship between followers and leaders as a whole and viewed it as a series of vertical dyads. As the vertical dyad theory evolved, Graen et al. (1982) renamed it the LMX theory. However, the basic tenets of the theory remained the same.

The development of LMX occurred in four stages (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Figure 1 depicts the four stages of LMX development. The first stage involved the discovery of differentiated dyads. During the second stage, researchers investigated the LMX relationship characteristics and organizational outcomes. Research that occurred in the third stage described the building of dyadic partnerships, and the final phase was the aggregation of differentiated dyadic relationships into group and network levels. Changes occurred during each phase of the theory's development as researchers learned from previous studies. The basic premise of LMX centered on the type of relationship that leaders formed with each follower (Matta et al., 2015).

Figure 1

Evolution of LMX



Note. Four stages in LMX theory development. Reprinted from "Relationship-Based Approach to Leadership: Development of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory of Leadership Over 24 years: Applying a Multi-Level Multi-Domain Perspective," by G. B. Graen and M. Uhi-Bien, 1995, *The Leadership Quarterly*, *6*, p. 226. Copyright1995 by Digital Commons @ University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Stage 1

The primary concept of early vertical dyad linkage research focused on differentiated relationships that resulted from limited resources available to managers. Managers, therefore, were constrained by the number of high-quality exchanges that could be developed and maintained. The results of longitudinal studies indicated that leaders formed different relationships with subordinates over time, resulting in high-quality and low-quality relationships (Nie & Lamsa, 2015). Strong MXs included challenging and attractive work assignments, higher potential earnings, and more significant input into organizational processes. In contrast, those with lower quality exchanges received benefits according to the individual employee's contract (Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2018). Due to the leader's limited time and social resources, high-quality exchanges were developed with a small group of employees.

Two general kinds of relationships are formed using LMX: the in-group and the out-group (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Followers who are actively involved in negotiating with leaders concerning their expanded roles and responsibilities become members of the in-group. The negotiations involve followers doing more than their formal job description entailed in exchange for leaders doing more for the follower. Employees who are not interested in additional responsibilities are given mundane tasks, have a formal relationship with the leader, and are members of the out-group (Singh & Rukta, 2018). Members in the in-group receive more information, influence, confidence, and concern from leaders than those in the out-group (Singh & Rukta, 2018). Members of the in-group are also viewed as more dependable, highly involved, and communicative. Those in the out-group are less compatible with the leader (Schuh et al., 2018).

Stage 2

The dyadic relationships described in the LMX theory have been investigated by researchers who confirmed the different relationships that leaders formed with each follower (see Graen, Liden, et al., 1982; Graen, Scandura, et al., 1986; Vecchio, 1982). Through a focus on the dyadic role-making process and interactive communication patterns (Cropanzano, Dasbrough, et al., 2017; Zhu et al., 2018), research has confirmed that the unique exchange between a leader and a follower influences an individual employee's decision to remain with an organization. Further, high-growth need, dependability, and the compatible decision-making style with the leader can influence employees' relationships with leaders (Graen, Scandura, et al., 1986; Paik, 2016). During the second stage of LMX, research thus validated the existence of differentiated relationships. Studies have shown significant and positive relationships between the exchange quality that benefited the leaders, members, and the organization.

Stage 3

Research during the third phase of LMX focused on developing effective leadership relationships or partnerships (Cropanzano, Dasbrough, et al., 2017; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Based on this research, leaders are expected to form a relationship with all followers rather than a select few. The perceived benefit of the LMX process during Stage 3 was seen as a more equitable process and had the potential for more high-quality relationships.

Stage 4

The study of LMX also focused on complex organizations and networks. Research suggested that LMX was a system of interdependent dyadic relationships that emerged from the enactment of roles by organizational members (Shaalan et al., 2019). The central tenet of the studies during the fourth stage of LMX development focused on the interdependencies of organizational members to accomplish tasks (Shaalan et al., 2019). Based on this research, the quality of the relationships influences the success or failure of work activities. High-quality and low-quality exchanges were investigated within single work units and their effect on group-level work processes and outcomes.

A few studies focused on the relationship between leader behaviors as a precursor to LMX. For example, Mahsud et al. (2010) suggested that relations-oriented behavior directly impacted LMX more so than other leader characteristics. Cumberland and Alagaraja (2016) also examined the vertical interaction between senior leaders and front-line employees. Using the television reality show *Undercover Boss* as a case study, Cumberland and Alagaraja (2016) interviewed 13 CEOs and found that senior leaders' exposure to employees' concerns could lead to policy changes and awareness of emergent issues.

Overall, LMX describes the interdependence between managers and followers that is necessary for growth opportunities. High-quality relationships are maintained through the exchange of valued resources that may not be financial. The exchange can be intangible such as socioemotional or symbolic, which can produce a higher-quality relationship (Reb et al., 2018). Effective leadership outcomes occur when leaders and followers can both benefit from the relationship.

Criticism of LMX Theory

LMX has been criticized for its lack of clarity regarding the theory and units of analysis as well as inconsistencies in theoretical and methodological conceptualizations (Epitropaki & Martin, 2016; Martin et al., 2018). Researchers have argued that the theory did not fully explain how leaders created high-quality relationships (Anand et al., 2016), and others criticized the theory for not identifying specific characteristics of an effective leader and for proposing the alienation of some employees (Power, 2013). However, an understanding of leaders' specific behaviors could lead to an understanding of required behaviors for higher-quality relationships (Little et al., 2016).

Additionally, researchers have suggested three main problems with current research on LMX (Gooty & Yammarino, 2016). First, LMX is based on a dyadic model, but most research rarely conceptualizes, measures, and analyzes data at the dyadic level. A review of LMX literature disclosed that a misalignment between theory and measurement occurred in 68% of studies, and misalignment occurred 86% of the time when the dyad level was the theoretical focus of the study (Gooty & Yammarino, 2016). Second, leaders and followers do not often share the same perception of the relationship, a core tenet of the LMX model. The different perspectives of the relationship were ignored in previous studies. Lastly, prior LMX differentiation drew on the social comparison theory that violated the construction of shared realities between leaders' fairness and equality (Gooty & Yammario, 2016).

The notion of inequities remains questionable if the leader does not intentionally develop the out-groups, and all members are allowed to join the in-group (Northouse, 2018). Additionally, the theory does not address issues surrounding followers' perceptions of justice or fairness, such as pay increases, promotional opportunities (distributive justice), decision-making rules (procedural justice), and communication issues (interaction justice) (Scandura, 1999). Despite criticism, LMX remains a prominent and useful approach that has advanced the scientific and practical understanding of the leader-follower relationship in the workplace (Yu et al., 2018).

Supporting Theory: SET

The SET, considered one of the most influential conceptual theories for understanding behavior in the workplace, was built on the premise that social interactions are an exchange of activity, tangible and intangible rewards, and costs (Nunkoo, 2016). Homans introduced SET in 1958 that emphasized the relationship between two parties dependent on each other for valued outcomes (Nunkoo, 2016). These interactions were viewed as interdependent and dependent on the actions of each person (Huang et al., 2016).). The theory presupposed that interdependent activities could potentially generate high-quality relationships.

There are different perspectives on SET. The SET lacked sufficient precision, which limited its use (Cropanzano, Dasbrough, et al., 2017). People stay with an organization, although the relationship may be inequitable than when the SET would predict leaving the situation. Researchers agreed that social exchange involved a series of interactions that generated obligations (Redmond, 2015). Thibaut and Kelly (1959) added to SET by including evaluating the benefits perceived by those involved in the social interaction process (Stamolampros et al., 2019). Daspit et al. (2016) explained social behavior as an exchange process and was the first to associate theory with a process (Paraskevaidis & Andriotis, 2017). Emerson (1962) contributed to the SET by theorizing the imbalance of power on the relationship. A power imbalance could create an unstable relationship (Redmond, 2015). The characteristics of the SET resources were initially viewed as an economic value (Cropanzano, Dasbrough, et al., 2017). As the theory evolved, other resources appeared that stretched beyond material goods.

Research on social exchange emphasized trust as a benefit of the relationship (Porter, 2018). To build trust, participants agree that neither party will pursue their self-interest at the expense of the other party. The SET specifies two kinds of trust that emerged from the reciprocation of benefits (Lioukas & Reuer, 2015; Shahsavarani et al., 2016). The two types of trust are known as institutionalization-based trust and affect-based trust. Institutionalization-based trust is grounded in the idea that both partners are confident that neither will act in their self-interest, as it would violate conduct norms established over time (Lioukas & Reuer, 2015). Cropanzano, Dasbrough, et al. (2017) argued that reciprocity is the foundation of the relationship when participants are compelled to give in return for something proportionately given. Secondly, affect-trust, also based on the belief that neither party will operate in their self-interest, is based on emotional attachment or friendship. The relationship is valuable to both partners; therefore, actions that would violate or harm the association are not pursued.

Cooper-Thomas et al. (2018) stipulated six types of exchange resources: love, status, information, money, goods, and services. The resources are divided into a two-dimensional matrix. One is particularism, while the second dimension is referred to as concreteness. Particularism resources are those that are based on the source of the provision. Concreteness relies on how tangible or specific resources. The more concrete a benefit, the more likely the resource is short-term. The opposite is also true in that the more particular the exchange, the more it is an open-ended matter (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2018).

Contemporary research on the SET focused on workplace relationships. Shore et al. (2018) examined the relationship between social and economic exchanges and the effect on affective commitment as well as turnover intentions on employer trust and altruism. Cropanzano, Dasbrough, et al. (2017) considered the affective events theory to understand LMX development. Scott and Zweig (2020) studied the extent that a leader's behavior had on the follower's perception of the organization and exchanges. Leaders could influence the follower's attitudes and behaviors through various methods such as communication of ideas and values. Researchers criticized the theory for not including the power of emotions that may cause people to make irrational decisions (Crossman, 2019). The theory does not consider the power of social structures and forces that unconsciously shape individuals' feelings and experiences based on their interactions with others (Crossman, 2019).

The literature on social exchange suggested that the exchange during the relationship determined the value derived by each party (Lai and Yang, 2020). Daspit et al. (2016) posited that only through a social exchange will feelings of personal obligations, gratitude, and trust emerge. Cropanzano, Anthony, et al. (2017) emphasized problems with the social exchange concept based on its ambiguities and empirical needs. Cropanzano, Anthony, et al. (2017) noted there were frequent misunderstandings of the model, while the model's difficulties were systemic. The core ideas of SET had not been adequately stated and integrated. As a result, subsequent tests and applications of the model used incomplete specified ideas. The ambiguity and incompleteness of the model created further problems (Cropanzano, Anthony, et al., 2017). First, the model's constructs were not specified, resulting in critical theoretical variables being overlooked (Cropanzano, Anthony, et al., 2017). Secondly, some formulations of the model were ambiguous, leading to critical theoretical assumptions resulting in multiple interpretations. Critics of the SET suggested that it had limited use because of insufficient theoretical precision (Cropanzano, Anthony, et al., 2017). Theoretical purists claimed that it was not a theory because of researchers' diverse contributions and directions.

Supporting Theory: Role Theory

Role theory suggested that role making is a constantly changing process that involved the employee and their supervisor (Hassan, 2013; Thies & Sari, 2018). Role theory is a set of normative expectations that define positions in the social structure (Chen & Tang, 2018). The theory showed norms established for reaching specified goals as a result of interactions between parties. Chen and Tang (2018) determined that normative behavior is goal oriented. Employees are given clues by leaders that guide their behavior. With feedback regarding the behavior, the employee learns to accept patterns that could be modified over time (Graen, Liden, et al., 1982). Organizations are role systems comprised of role sending and role-taking (Thies & Sari, 2018). In the organization, every position in the organizational structure comes with a set of expectations, and the employee is expected to act and respond according to established expectations (Thies & Sari, 2018).

According to Venkatesh and Goyal (2010), expectation is defined as a group of beliefs about an event, product, or person. All participants in the relationship are believed to have expectations of specific outcomes. Additionally, the role theory suggests that members in each role establish expectations of what leaders should or should not do regarding their various responsibilities. These expectations of leaders are standards that subordinates use to evaluate the leaders' performance. Jackson (2011) criticized the theory for erroneously specifying that certain normative behavioral expectations were universally accepted. Role-taking and sending processes often encounter challenges, whereas the sent roles and the received roles may not be the same.

Using the framework of the role theory, Palomino and Frezatti (2016) used a structural equation technique to study the role of controllers in a Brazilian enterprise. The sample size was comprised of 114 controllers who were given electronic questionnaires to gather data on their perceptions regarding the level of conflict, ambiguity, and job satisfaction. Results indicated that controllers were more strongly affected by role ambiguity than by role conflict (Palomino & Frezatti, 2016).

Larivière et al. (2017) suggested that role theory was based on a dramaturgical metaphor where individuals' role was the focus instead of the individual's behavior. The basic theatrical metaphor application of the role theory confused some researchers. The theory was applied loosely, and early proponents of the theory differed in the way that it was used (Yang, 2020). The primary confusion centered on terminology. Some theorists referred to the term as characterization behavior (Qian et al., 2018), social parts (Nadiv et al., 2017). and social conduct (Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm, 2019).

Contrasting Theory: March & Simon Employee Withdrawal Model

Scholars have proposed numerous theories to understand and predict voluntary turnover. March and Simon (1993) introduced the first model of employee withdrawal based on movement ease and desirability (Hom et al., 2015). March and Simon (1993) stated that all employees have two fundamental decisions regarding the organization. The first choice was the decision to produce, while the second was the decision to participate. March and Simon (1993) defined the first decision, to produce, as employees' willingness to work hard and produce as much as the organization demanded. The second decision, to participate, involved employees, customers, and investors choosing to remain with or leave the organization.

Analyzing their earlier work, March and Simon (1993) suggested that the most significant deficiency of their study was the treatment of the empirical evidence. The original study was a case study that drew upon a large body of available literature. Advances in methods of dealing with nonquantitative verbal data systematically could have significantly improved March and Simon's previous study (March & Simon, 1993).

Contrasting Theory: Mobley's Job Satisfaction Model

Mobley introduced the job satisfaction conceptual model in 1977. Mobley proposed that employees experienced seven sequential steps between job dissatisfaction and actual turnover. Mobley (1977) theorized that job dissatisfaction more than likely led an employee to: (1) think about quitting; (2) evaluate the elements of looking for another job and the costs of phenomena; (3) intend to look for other jobs; (4) search for another job; (5) evaluate of accepting any of the identified jobs; (6) compare other jobs to present job; and (7) intend to quit. Employees may not experience all steps described in Mobley's model nor follow the steps in sequence because of the nature of the psychological process

(Jaros et al., 2017). The importance of the model was the identification of the behavioral process that led to voluntary turnover.

Job satisfaction involves the emotions, feelings, thoughts, and perceptions of employees toward their job or workplace (Munir & Rahman, 2016). Researchers focused on job satisfaction because of its positive outcome on job performance, customers' perception of service quality, and employees' commitment (Lu et al., 2016). Mobley posited that the process of turnover would not be complete unless four issues were resolved. First, processes are considered dynamic; therefore, change must be integrated and time considered to understand the process. At different points in the process and at differing times, individuals may experience feedback loops and may change their reactions. Lastly, viewed as a process, turnover was comprised of actions and operations that may be attitudinal, cognitive, and behavioral. Mobley et al. (1979) expanded on the job satisfaction model and identified additional variables such as labor, organization, job, individual, and external factors. Li et al. (2016) posited job satisfaction and job alternatives remained key constructs of turnover models; however, a single study would unlikely capture the expanded model's entire complexity in critiquing Mobley's model,

Most seminal studies focused on job attitudes as the primary driver of turnover. Adongo et al. (2019) suggested that future research should examine additional factors such as supervisor or organization support, LMX, or job embeddedness. Researchers also examined the role of sales managers and their performance. Mobley's model profoundly affected other research studies.

LMX Relationships of Potential Themes and Phenomena

Researchers examined the role of sales managers and the performance of salespeople. Amyx et al. (2019) surveyed 312 salespeople from various industries to develop a model that examined organizational outcomes: goal acceptance, sales performance, and organizational commitment. DeConinck and DeConinck (2017) examined the effects of organizational justice on a salesperson's perceived organizational support, perceived supervisor support, performance, and salesperson turnover in a business-to-business setting. Jaramillo and Prakash (2008) found that supportive leadership leads to higher salesperson effort through a mediating process involving intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy. Common themes revealed through research on LMX and organizational outcomes were communication, leadership, and trust. I expect to see common themes appear in answers provided by sales managers interviewed for this study. Common themes that could emerge from in-depth interviews with sales managers regarding the voluntary turnover of sales representatives include leadership, trust, and communication. The positive outcomes are based on the LMX theory as subordinates in high-quality exchanges receive better roles, increased communication, higher levels of trust, and increased access to the supervisor (Schuh et al., 2018).

Leadership

Managers' responsibility in an organization is demanding and requires the ability to impact people, reach organizational goals, and lead subordinates. Historically, leaders' role in a sales context is related to classic leadership theories (Hayati et al., 2018). Leadership style is considered a critical factor in motivating, guiding, and influencing salespeople to play an influential role in performance efforts. Domingues et al. (2017) examined the moderating effects of leadership style. The relationship between goal orientations and performance was based on transformational and transactional leadership styles. The study's results indicated that the transactional leadership style positively affected sales performance, whereas the transformational leadership style weakened performance. Transactional leadership behavior consisted of an exchange between leaders and followers. A transformational leadership style promoted employee performance because the company and the salesperson's values aligned. Hayati et al. (2018) suggested that the traditional view of leadership as top-down is challenged by a more complex and dynamic sales process that supports a more relational and distributed style. Depending on the competitive environment, managers should adapt their style to maximize organizational outcomes.

Trust

Trust between leaders and subordinates is essential. Jawahar et al. (2019) defined trust as an individual's willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of another person based on expectations that result in beneficial actions. Byun et al. (2017) defined trust as an individual's willingness to act based on the words, actions, and decisions of others. Trust could be developed through the quality of LMX (Jawahar et al., 2019). Trust influences interpersonal and organizational exchange relationships that include LMX. A high-quality relationship occurs when mutual trust and resource exchange occur between the leader and members (Byun et al., 2017). Research on LMX revealed that members' trust in a leader was an antecedent of LMX. Some studies distinguished leaders' trust in the members from members’ trust in the leaders. Leaders’ trust in members was a fundamental factor in influencing the interactions between leaders and members.

Communication

Brown et al. (2019) described communication as an instrument that leaders can use to build healthy and productive relationships with subordinates. Through the lens of LMX, leadership is a relationship between supervisors and subordinates that is described as communicative acts (Brown et al., 2019). Additionally, informational communication, transformational leadership, and LMX could foster the employee’s affective commitment triggering desirable outcomes such as reduced turnover, absenteeism, higher job performance, and organizational citizenship behaviors (Brown et al., 2019).

Employee Retention

Employee retention is a vital issue for business leaders because of the negative financial impact turnover has on the organization (Mandhanya, 2015). The cost to the firm can be enormous regarding replacement cost, culture, and employee morale (Coetzee et al., 2016). Retention is described as the process of keeping employees at the company for an extended period (Aguenza & Som, 2018). Hadi and Ahmed (2018) defined employee retention as a process used by management to maintain a productive workforce while meeting operational needs. Deeba et al. (2015) described retention as a strategy to influence employees to remain with the organization for the maximum period or to complete a project. Although researchers differ in their description of retention, its meaning remains the same. The long-term success of an organization is dependent upon the recruitment and retention of the right people.

Employee retention is a critical factor in business success and is the number one concern for business leaders (Trends, 2016). Ramlall (2004) proposed that employee retention presents a challenging problem in a highly competitive job market. Companies lose approximately $1 million per 10 managerial or professional employees who will leave the company (Ramlall, 2004). Employee retention is essential for replacement costs. It is also important due to the loss of valuable knowledge, experience, morale, productivity, customer satisfaction, and the company's reputation when employees depart (Aguenza & Som, 2018). Knowledge and expertise can be an advantage for the competition when employees are lured away and become a disadvantage for the former employer. Consequences of turnover have received significantly less attention (Ton & Huckman, 2008). Ton and Huckman (2008) posited that the lack of research on the consequences of employee turnover is surprising, considering practitioners often cite the significant economic impact of turnover.

Profits

The economic impact of employee turnover mainly examines factors that are affected by employee absence and change of employment (Buzeti et al., 2016; Cloutier et al., 2015). Palesciuc (2017) emphasized the importance of employee retention from an economic viewpoint. Turnover creates direct costs in recruiting and training and generates indirect costs due to disruption in company routine and productivity. The departure of salespeople could drive the costs to organizations even higher. Sunder et al. (2017) posited that U.S. businesses spend approximately $800 billion to incentivize the salesforce and another $15 billion toward training the salesforce. Salespeople are most often the only contact between the firm and the customer (Sunder et al., 2017). When the relationship between the customer and salesperson is severed, the economic impact could be substantial.

Depending on the industry, employees' positions, and salary, the replacement cost of an employee could vary. The organizational expense of replacing an employee can cost up to 200% of the departing worker's salary (Cloutier et al., 2015), while the loss of knowledge is more difficult to ascertain in numerical terms (Shen & Ke, 2017). Shen and Ke (2017) considered the intangible costs associated with the loss of productive employees. The intangible cost to organizations could be attributed to the loss of valuable knowledge and the connection to expertise networks that existed externally and internally. From an economic viewpoint, high employee turnover increases a business's expenses (Cloutier et al., 2015) and reduces profits (Shen & Ke, 2017)).

Hancock et al. (2013) meta-analysis provided empirical evidence of the harmful effects of turnover. Companies with high-performing talent produce 18% more revenue than low-performing companies (Erickson, 2017). Studies further revealed that profits per employee increased by 30% with high-performing employees (Erickson, 2017). Contrary to Erickson (2017), Hancock et al. (2013) acknowledged that the harmful effects were not universally supported as these effects could sometimes be contingent on other moderators and produce positive consequences. Practitioners and scholars recognized that losing valuable employees could negatively impact company profits.

Productivity

Maertz and Campion (1998) explored the relationship between employee retention and productivity. Productivity is the measurement used to determine the targeted production achievement of a company's workforce and strategy (Maertz & Campion, 1998). Employee turnover affects the overall productivity of an organization (Buzeti et al., 2016). Buzeti et al. (2016) investigated the relationship between turnover ratio and labor productivity and found that practitioners are often not aware of the revenue lost to decreased productivity when employees leave the company.

Employees who leave the company take with them the expertise of the job; procedures of why and how decisions are made; awareness of work practices; and knowledge of the company's successes and failures (Cloutier et al., 2015). The departure leaves a void in the enterprise where productivity is slowed. Yanadori and Kato (2007) studied Japanese firms in a variety of industries to investigate the relationship between the voluntary turnover ratio of a firm and its labor productivity. López and Sune (2013) studied turnover-induced forgetting (knowledge loss or depreciation) and its impact on productivity. Yanadori and Kato (2007) gathered surveys from publicly traded Japanese firms between 2002 and 2003. The researchers also gathered information from business publications resulting in 330 firms in the 2002 data set and 301 firms in the 2003 data set. López and Sune (2013) conducted an in-depth exploratory case study to identify organizational forgetting. The empirical evidence revealed that organizational forgetting occurred when employees abruptly left the company. To confirm the data gathered from the exploratory case study, the researchers used multiple regression models to measure the impact of organizational forgetting on overall productivity. The results of the studies revealed that employee turnover induced knowledge loss and decreased labor productivity (López & Sune, 2013) and was detrimental to a firm's performance (Yanadori & Kato, 2007).

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is defined as an emotional state of pleasure based on the evaluation of an employee's job (Shukla & Singh, 2016); the degree that people like their job (Che Nawi et al., 2016); and the extent that employees feel personally fulfilled and content in their position (Yousef, 2017). Lefkowitz and Katz (1969) saw job satisfaction as a function of the perception of the relationship between what one wants and what the job entails (Shukla & Deb, 2017). Yousef (2017) found that job satisfaction was a combination of psychological and environmental circumstances that caused people to be satisfied with their work. Job satisfaction is the main predictor of employees' intention to leave a profession or company (Huang et al., 2016). Li et al. (2016) found that organizational leaders should develop strategies to reduce a salesperson's overload, leading to lower job satisfaction. Those who experience higher job satisfaction are less likely to leave, whereas a person who feels lower satisfaction is more likely to leave the organization. Although numerous factors might influence the length of time people spend in their careers, most employees leave due to dissatisfaction.

Researchers discussed motivation and job satisfaction in the same context. According to Bui (2017), the argument could be made that the degree that an individual is satisfied is dictated by factors and circumstances that motivate them. Early approaches to motivation explained the desire to act as an intention to maximize positive results while minimizing negative consequences. Contemporary theories of motivation and job satisfaction provided a framework for organizations to better influence employees' drive to work and increase their job enthusiasm (Bui, 2017).

da Borralha et al. (2016) posited that there is an abundance of research on job satisfaction. However, there was a lack of studies on different methods used to measure employee job satisfaction levels. da Borralha et al. (2016) attributed Lee and Way (2010) for perceiving the lack of research using various methods that contributed to the number of variables and variations of essential factors. Qureshi and Hamid (2017) emphasized that job satisfaction levels were impossible to measure using one specific measure. It is, therefore, important that future research explore and understand critical factors of job satisfaction and individual characteristics that distinguish the individual level of satisfaction. Most job satisfaction and motivation research neglected individual differences.

Job Dissatisfaction

Kumar and Mathimaran (2017) stipulated that there is a close correlation between employees who quit and those who remained with the company, although dissatisfied. Due to its subjectivity, job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are difficult to measure. However, research has shown that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are strong predictors of employees' intention to leave a job.

Herzberg's two-factor theory revealed that employees voluntarily leave companies due to working conditions, company policy, and management (Zheng & Bai, 2018). Herzberg (1974) studied 200 predominately male engineers and accountants and used stories of employees' lived experiences to identify elements that participants found most dissatisfying about their jobs. Herzberg (1974) discovered hygiene factors contributed to job dissatisfaction. Hygiene factors refer to the context of an employee's job, such as working conditions or company policies. Herzberg (1974) stated that the opposite of job satisfaction is not dissatisfaction but no job dissatisfaction.

Hill (1986) applied the two-factor theory to higher education, with results supporting Herzberg's findings indicating that dissatisfaction is linked to salary, fringe benefits, administrative features, and collegial associations. Clark (1997) suggested that the degree of job satisfaction was a more meaningful indicator than salary or length of occupation. Redditt et al. (2019) found that managers' ability to identify employees who have intentions to quit after experiencing job dissatisfaction could lessen turnover. Arslan Yurumezoglu and Kocaman's (2016) research showed that intentions to leave a job were strongly correlated with low job satisfaction.

According to Huysse-Gaytandjieva et al. (2012), employees sometimes remained with an organization even though they were dissatisfied. Dissatisfaction could have adverse effects on both the employee and the organization. Job lock and stuck are terms used to describe employees who remain at the company and are dissatisfied (Huysse-Gaytandjieva et al., 2012). Job lock is associated with employees who do not feel free to leave due to the limited portability of benefits. On the other hand, stuck refers to personality factors that keep employees hooked in their jobs, such as commitment, job investments, and embeddedness. Huysse-Gaytandjieva et al. (2012) theorized that employees who are unhappy with their job adapt and find different ways to deal with dissatisfaction. Employees' reactions to dissatisfaction were classified into two groups: psychological (responsibility, avoidance, and lateness) and physical (absenteeism and turnover). Huysse-Gaytandjieva et al. (2012) used five categories to describe employee behavior. They are problem-solving, exit, avoidance, equity-enhancing retaliation, and capitulation. (Kimunya et al., 2019). Kimunya et al. (2019) categorized job dissatisfaction responses into three categories: exit, voice, and loyalty. In response to dissatisfaction, employees may quit (Leineweber et al., 2016) or find various solutions to address the issue.

Employee turnover has continued to grow in complexity with multiple motivating variables. Herzberg (1974) suggested that motivation was a crucial factor in determining job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction. Motivation theorists suggested that knowing what drivers influence employees to remain with the organization is essential to reduce voluntary turnover (Givens-Skeaton & Ford, 2018; Herzberg, 1974).

LMX and Employee Retention

Research on leadership and LMX theory focuses on how exchanges between leaders and followers form leaders (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). This leadership approach submits that leaders should develop high-quality relationships with all followers rather than build a relationship with a select few. Leaders should make every follower feel a part of the in-group while avoiding inequities and negative implications of being in the out-group. Leadership-making imbues partnerships where the leader builds effective dyads with all followers (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). According to Graen and Uhl-Bien

(1995), relationships develop over time in three phases. The first phase is the stranger phase, where relationships are rule-bound. The association is of a lower quality where the follower complies with formal requirements and the hierarchical status to achieve economic rewards. The acquaintance phase, or the second phase, begins when the leader or follower offers improved career-oriented social exchanges symbolized by sharing more resources and information of a personal or work-related nature (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). It is a testing period to ascertain when the follower is willing to take on more responsibility and when the leader is amenable to offer more challenging work assignments. Using the LMX theory to measure the quality of the relationship, the connection evolves and improves to one of medium quality. The last phase is a high-quality, mature partnership with mutual trust, respect, and obligation towards each other (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). There is a high degree of reciprocity between the parties.

LMX studies typically use questionnaires to assess leaders' and followers' perceptions of the effectiveness of their working relationship (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Sunder et al.'s (2017) longitudinal study of data from 6,727 salespeople in the retail industry further postulated that the relationship between managers and salespeople is essential. Schwepker (2017) surveyed 408 business-to-business salespeople to examine the roles of psychological, ethical climate, and LMX in encouraging commitment, customer value, unethical intentions, and sales performance. The results of Schwepker's study indicated that ethical perceptions influenced relationships between salespeople and sales management. Conversely, data gathered over two years in Sunder et al.'s (2017) study revealed that peer turnover greatly influenced a salesperson's intention of quitting.

Specifically, Sunder et al. (2017) cautioned managers that strategies to retain salespeople begin at the management level as they have more contact and influence over the salesforce. The superior-subordinate relationship plays a critical role in the overall effectiveness of the organization because of the impact these relationships have on critical organizational outcomes (Schwepker, 2017). It is important to understand the antecedents and consequences of the leader-member relationship (Schwepker, 2017).

Miner et al. (2005) found that employees rated interactions with managers as 80% positive and 20% negative. The negative interactions affected employees' behavior five times more than positive interactions (Miner et al., 2005). Gilbreath and Benson (2004) studied the effects of supervisors' behavior on the psychological well-being of employees and concluded that supervisor behavior profoundly impacted subordinates' behavior. Mathieu et al. (2016) recommended that future research address leadership role in turnover events testing the LMX theory. Raghuram et al. (2017) studied the advantages and disadvantages of LMX after the employee left the organization. The researchers posited that former employees' goodwill toward the organization was important to the company's reputation and brand. The strength of the LMX-alumni goodwill relationship depended on whether managers made a significant effort to retain the employees (Raghuram et al., 2017). Mathieu et al. (2016) recommended that future research address leadership role in turnover events testing the LMX theory.

Employee Retention and Sales Representative

Advertising sales agents sell space to businesses and individuals (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Sales executives work in various industries, including radio, television, and internet publishing. They are responsible for generating revenue by contacting business associates referred to as clients, making sales presentations, and maintaining client accounts through effective customer service. Managers of sales organizations should be concerned with turnover because the salesperson is intimately involved with the customer-relationship building process (Larivière et al., 2017; Sunder et al., 2017). The high turnover of salespeople has implications for the management in lost revenue through training and incentives and decreased customer satisfaction (Sunder et al., 2017). Researching turnover in salesforce management is more than 20 years old; thus, empirical work investigating turnover behavior is limited. Both managerial and academic perspectives influence my motivation for studying salesforce turnover.

Management perceived the retention of the sales force as a critical objective. The cost associated with the departure of a single salesperson could range from $50,000 to $70,000 (Wang & Chen, 2017). The adverse financial impact on the organization and motivation of the salesforce could be substantial. The turnover rate in the sales profession is two times higher compared to other careers. Additionally, replacing the salesperson who left the organization is more complicated than different positions (Johnson et al., 2016). Higher wages significantly reduced turnover; however, companies can adopt a wide range of other strategies to retain sales representatives (Michael et al., 2016; Wang & Chen, 2017).

Shetty and Basri (2018) posited that work culture is influenced by management and leadership who govern the environment, the LMX, and employees' perceptions of the workplace. Leadership creates a workplace climate that may heighten or dampen employee attitudes supporting the intention of a salesperson to quit or the intention to search for alternative employment. Rajabi et al. (2019) suggested that understanding the causes and influences of salesforce turnover is vital to reduce turnover costs. Shetty and Basri (2018) suggested that turnover literature, in general, is well developed; however, there is still much to be learned. Research on sales turnover could benefit from recent methodological and theoretical advances in psychological, economic, and organizational theory.

Media and Public Relations Industry

From a practitioner's perspective, high turnover is still a widespread problem for the media and PR industry (CIPR Influence, 2014). It is normal for employees to stay with a company for one to two years before moving to another entity. Research by Oxford Economics stated that companies suffer significant financial loss due to high staff turnover (CIPR Influence, 2014). The 2014 survey by Oxford Economics estimates that the loss of talent costs the industry £184 million per year. Although the employee replacement cost accounts for a small part of the logical cost, firms' main cost is the loss of production. Greater competition and an uncertain international economic environment increase the demand for skilled employees (Alexiadou et al., 2017). Employees who direct contact with customers are of particular importance. The customer's experience with staff influences the perception of quality and satisfaction. This relationship is crucial, particularly for the media industry, as the majority of their revenue comes from advertising sales (Diel, 2017). The media industry is dependent upon satisfied customers who continuously purchase advertising space. The turnover of salespeople could harm an organization's performance and outcomes.

Customer Satisfaction

The relationship between the employee turnover rate and the customer satisfaction level has been studied across different industries. Sales-driven organizations should be concerned with turnover because the salesperson is intimately involved with the customer-relationship building process (Sunder et al., 2017). Salespeople are most often the only contact between the firm and the customer (Sunder et al., 2017).

The high turnover of salespeople has implications for management in lost revenue through training and incentives and decreased customer satisfaction (Sunder et al., 2017). Woods (2014) posited that research data from an insurance company and a restaurant chain revealed a 75% to 55 % decrease in customer satisfaction levels when frontline service workers left the insurance company. The restaurant chain saw an increase of 55% in profits when employee turnover was lowered. Kumar and Yakhlef (2016) submitted that it is less expensive and time-consuming to retain customers than to recruit new customers. The relationship between clients and employees can be stronger than the connection between the client and the firm. When the employee-customer relationship is severed through turnover, customers may experience feelings of uncertainty.

Kumar and Yakhlef (2016) used a case study design to build a framework for understanding how firms successfully manage client relationships when turnover occurs. The three chosen firms were of different sizes in terms of employees and revenue. According to Kumar and Yakhlef (2016), the study of this phenomenon was critical in the current technological and competitive landscape. There was little research on how corporations can proactively manage the threat of personnel attrition and maintain long-term relationships with clients (Kumar & Yakhlef, 2016).

Yu and Tseng (2016) studied employee turnover and customer relationships and proposed strategies to mitigate the effects of attrition. The suggested strategies included rotation of employees, advance notification of new hires, sharing pertinent information among employees, and protecting knowledge created during projects. Subramony and Holtom (2012) tested a model linking service employee attrition, customer-perceived service outcomes, and the financial performance of 64 businesses. The firms' data and analysis concentrated on managing their relationships with clients under the threat of high attrition. The study concluded that attrition adversely affected the service capabilities and performance of the company. Relationships with clients were at risk due to the customers' perception of service quality, project delivery, and knowledge loss.

Woods (2014) examined 76 banking centers to identify and analyze the relationship between employee turnover and customer satisfaction. In the correlational study, Woods (2014) revealed a relationship between customer satisfaction and employee turnover; as employee turnover increased, customer satisfaction decreased. Izogo (2017) confirmed that there was a relationship between customer loyalty and service quality.

An abundance of literature on employee retention and turnover exists. However, minimal research is available on leading turnover causes and retention strategies that managers could apply to enhance organizational effectiveness and productivity (Chowdhury-Abdullah & Hasan, 2017). There is also minimal scholarly research using a qualitative methodology to examine voluntary employee turnover (Allen et al., 2014). Allen et al. (2014) concluded that after a meta-analysis of turnover literature in 11 leading management publications, only 3% had a qualitative component, and only 1% was exclusively qualitative. Al-Emadi et al. (2015) found a lack of qualitative studies that addressed issues, strategies, and challenges related to employee retention in human resources while conducting a meta-analysis of the turnover literature. Al-Emadi et al. (2015) determined that 7.3% of research studies used a qualitative research method compared to 53% who used a quantitative methodology (Al-Emadi et al., 2015). Allen et al. (2014) posited that qualitative studies could provide more in-depth, richer accounts of turnover and nuances that may be difficult to uncover using quantitative methods.

The retention of employees does not rely on one strategy because an employees' decision to remain with the company is affected by various factors such as job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction. Employees who voluntarily leave the company often attribute their departure to management's negative behavior. Managers are encouraged to develop multiple strategies and policies that address employees' diverse needs.

Successful Retention Strategies

Kumar and Mathimaran (2017) described employee retention as a systematic effort to create and foster an environment that encourages employees to remain with the company. Successful retention strategies can be a powerful tool that contributes to the long-term health of the organization by retaining the best employees. Employee retention strategies enable leadership to improve employee commitment and support for corporate initiatives (Kumar & Mathimaran, 2017). Employees remain with the company when they receive motivating tools such as bonuses and fair pay (Pohler & Schmidt, 2015). Aguenza and Som (2018) argued that non-financial incentives are more effective than compensation in keeping key personnel. Thus, leaders should consider as many options as possible to retain employees.

Employees stay with companies for several reasons depending on their age, family situations, career and learning opportunities, benefits, or promotional opportunities (Haider et al., 2015). Strategies that focus on the employee have been shown to increase employee retention and engagement. Researchers explored strategies that influence employee turnover and employee retention, such as supportive leadership (Kim et al., 2017), work-family balance (Deery & Jago, 2015), training and development opportunities (Sattigeri, 2016), and recognition and rewards (Gallus & Frey, 2016).

Leadership

Researchers noted that leadership style directly influenced the organization's ability to retain its workforce (Kossivi et al., 2016). Supportive leader behavior is a critical factor in motivating employees. Leaders who create a friendly and psychologically supportive work environment provide emotional support for subordinates (Sökmen et al., 2015). Sendawula et al. (2018) suggested that management was integral to employee engagement. Employees feel encouraged in a supportive work environment that includes collaboration with supervisors, organization leadership, and peers (Kundu & Lata, 2017). Qiu et al. (2015) posited that management's concern toward employees and customers affected turnover intention, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Arici (2018) contended that a leadership strategy that adopted a supportive attitude contributed to the organization's wellbeing by improving employee job outcomes, work engagement, and proactive behaviors.

Researchers considered different leadership styles and their impact on reducing employee turnover. Arici (2018) researched whether an authentic leadership style decreased turnover intention in the hospitality industry. The results of the study indicated that an authentic leadership style could reduce turnover intentions. Jang and Kandampully (2018) examined the impact of servant leadership on turnover intentions mediated by affective organizational commitment. The researchers found that servant leadership enhanced affective organizational commitment that contributed to reducing employee turnover intentions. Alatawi (2017) found a negative relationship between transformational leadership and employee intentions to leave. Although researchers found that different leadership styles positively influenced employee retention, one particular style is not recommended over another. Leadership is fundamental to the retention of high-potential employees (Letchmiah & Thomas, 2017). Thus, leaders should adopt a style that establishes trust and commitment.

Work-Family

Sharkey and Caska (2019) defined work-life balance as the employee's ability to manage work, family, and other commitments. Employees' ability to form a realistic and satisfying balance of the many factors that affect their daily lives could generate positive feelings toward the organization and management. Researchers have examined the effect of work-life balance on employee retention and found a positive association with managerial support as a determining factor. Some managers implemented practices that supported employees in reconciling multiple demands. These practices included flexible schedules, reduced working hours, allowances for family obligations, and leaves of absence.

Results of studies on work-life balance and positive employee outcomes were mixed. Stavrou and Ierodiakonou (2016) posited that company policies are not sufficient indicators of the quality of work-life balance initiatives. Other factors, such as organizational norms and management support, affected how policies are implemented. Although age did not determine employees’ needs or desires for work-life balance, Gilley et al. (2015) elucidated that management did affect the individual’s perception of support. Wynn and Rao (2020) stipulated that a positive correlation between the organization and employees occurred when policies led to higher work-life balance. Researchers found that a lack of work-life balance led to negative consequences, including employee withdrawal and turnover. Work-life conflict for some employees increased job stress and affected job performance.

Training and Development

Company leaders offer training and development to enhance employee skills, abilities, and knowledge. The development of employee skills increases organizational effectiveness (Fletcher et al., 2018). Previous research showed that training and development programs could increase retention if they met the needs of employees. Additionally, training and development strengthened the bond between employees and their managers (Fletcher et al., 2018). Umanmaheswari and Krishnan (2016) found that training and development in the ceramic sanitary industry influenced retention. Company leaders that invest in employee training and development expressed concern for the employees' career growth. Kakar et al. (2015) posited that employee retention is dependent on the organizations' investment in developing workers' skills and knowledge. According to Kakar et al., training alone does not increase retention; however, it should be included with other retention strategies.

Recognition and Awards

Recognition comes in many forms that range from acknowledgments and awards (Walk et al., 2019). Awards are considered a valuable strategic resource widely used in the corporate sector (Gallus & Frey, 2016). Awards come in two general forms: confirmatory awards and discretionary awards. Confirmatory awards are based on predetermined performance criteria, while discretionary awards are broad-based performance evaluations (Gallus & Frey, 2016). Awards could increase employees' productivity and engagement and spur competition among workers. Workers who do not receive awards may put forth more effort to receive recognition for hard work. Gallus and Frey (2016) stipulated that awards could establish loyalty to the company, whereas leaders are also held accountable for the individual's future activities. Shonubi et al. (2017) posited that rewarding employees positively affected their performance and could increase their desire to stay with the company.

Kelly et al. (2017) investigated the effects of tangible versus cash rewards in a tournament setting at a rug wholesaler. The winners in each tournament received cash rewards or gift cards. The results of the study were mixed. The type of award did not affect the first tournament, whereas in the second tournament, tangible awards increased sales efforts (Kelly et al., 2017). Nwokocha (2016) found a positive correlation between rewards and employees' performance, retention, and productivity. Nwokocha noted that if employees perceived rewards as inequitable and biased, individuals are thus, demotivated. Organizations that use a reward system should design strategies embedded in the company's culture, where employees' needs and desires are considered.

Transition

In Section 1, I included the problem statement and the purpose statement. I justified selecting a qualitative method and a multiple case study design. Section 1 of the study included interview questions, conceptual framework, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. Additionally, Section 1 of the study contained the significance of the study and a review of academic and professional literature. Section 1 also included an explanation of the background knowledge that stakeholders need to understand this study.

Section 2 and section 3 involve details about the research process. Section 2 primarily encompasses the methodology of the study and its various components. Section 3 also consists of details that relate to the analysis and presentation of data in this study on successful strategies sales managers use to reduce voluntary turnover of sales representatives in Alabama media companies.

Section 2: The Project

Sales representatives are often the only link between the company and the customers (Shi et al., 2017). When sales representatives depart, this crucial link is disrupted. Sales managers should understand and implement successful strategies that influence employees to remain with the company for extended periods. Since U.S. media companies' profits are dependent on the skills and talents of its salespeople, sales managers understand the specific needs of representatives in the media industry. These unmet needs could lead management to develop effective retention strategies.

This section describes, explains, and justifies the methodological approach used for the research as well as data collection and data analysis techniques. The section includes the research design and methodology, participants, sample, setting, the role of the researcher, data collection, data analysis, reliability, validity, and ethical considerations. The research study aimed to provide managers and leaders of media companies with a better understanding of the reasons for voluntary turnover. Knowledge of the voluntary turnover of sales representatives could help managers in developing effective retention strategies.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that sales managers use to reduce the voluntary turnover of sales representatives. The target population consisted of sales managers from six media companies in Alabama who successfully used retention strategies to reduce the turnover of sales representatives. The implications for positive social change include the potential to offer sales managers retention strategies that contribute to the economic health, growth, and educational needs of local communities. Further implications for social change included stable employment to create greater prosperity for local families and communities.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher in qualitative studies is the primary instrument for data collection (Antwi & Hamza, 2015; Rimando et al., 2015), creating study-specific questions to collect and analyze data concurrently and iteratively (Kallio et al., 2016; Twining et al., 2017). The researcher is also responsible for organizing the data collection process, including gaining access to the study's participants (Ibrahim & Edgley, 2015). Researchers also have a role in observing from the participants' viewpoint as an empathetic understanding (Sarma, 2015). Qualitative researchers gather and immerse themselves in relevant materials related to the research topic and ask questions to collect data (Mays & Pope, 2020). I was the primary data collection instrument who (a) recruited research participants, (b) collected data by interviewing the research participants, (c) analyzed data collected from the participants, (d) addressed the research question of the study, and (e) formulated a synthesis of the data.

Researchers also have an ethical responsibility to describe a study's limitations and account for potential bias. I adhered to the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements and the Belmont Report ethical principles and guidelines. The Belmont Report describes the basic ethical principles of research that involve human subjects (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2016). Three principles that guide ethical research include respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. The first principle, respect for persons, incorporates two ethical convictions: individuals should be treated as autonomous agents, and those with diminished autonomy are entitled to protection (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2016). The respect of persons includes consideration for the individual’s right to express opinions and choices. The researcher should not withhold information necessary for judgment. Following the Belmont Report and Walden University IRB guidelines, I used an informed consent form to explain the study’s purpose and ensure that participants were aware of potential risks and benefits derived from the study. The second principle, beneficence, refers to researchers’ obligation to prevent harm while maximizing benefits (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2016). Lastly, participants should be treated fairly and equally.

In addition to ethics, a researcher’s personal characteristics can impact research (Berger, 2015), such as the researcher’s background that can influence the study’s focus, planning, interpretations, and analysis (Omanović, 2019). Thus, it is important for researchers who have experience with the study topic to be aware of these potential pitfalls (Berger, 2015). I spent over 30 years in the media industry and have experience in employee retention and turnover. My experience in the media industry posed an advantage regarding intimate familiarity and a deeper understanding of the topic; however, it was important that I did not impose that experience on participants. Thus, I recognized the potential of bias based on my experience that could influence the research process. I used an interview protocol with each participant to mitigate any potential bias.

Further, bias is any influence that distorts the study's results (Buetow, 2019), making it important to recognize and understand bias (Galdas, 2017). Qualitative researchers are an integral part of the process; thus, it is not possible to separate the process from the researcher. However, an interview protocol is used to standardize data collection and minimize potential biases (Yeong et al., 2018). Researchers use a protocol to ensure that all subjects understand that participation is voluntary, and they can withdraw at any stage of the study without fear of reprisal or undue influence. The interview protocol also served as a reminder for securing a signed consent form and provide consistency of information shared by participants.

Additionally, to avoid communicating a personal view of the data, I used reflexivity, which was a method to monitor my involvement and enhance ethics (Berger, 2015). Reflexivity accounts for the researcher's values, beliefs, knowledge, biases, and how they affect the research process (Berger, 2015). Strategies for maintaining reflexivity include member checking, in-depth interviews, triangulation, keeping a diary, and creating an audit trail that explains the reasoning, judgment, and emotional reactions (Berger, 2015). Member checking is a method of ensuring that participants' meanings and perspectives are represented and not misinterpreted to fit the researcher's agenda (Birt et al., 2016). Participants are provided with a summary of the interview or findings for accuracy and verification. Additional strategies to mitigate personal biases include meticulous record-keeping (Noble & Smith, 2015). I conducted in-depth interviews with participants and reviewed data from relevant company records and public documentation while setting aside my personal experiences and biases that might influence the research process.

Participants

The selection of participants should have a clear rationale and fulfill a specific purpose related to the research question. The number of participants depends on what the researcher wants to know, the purpose, and the usefulness of the data (Etikan et al., 2016). I used a purposive sampling technique to select individuals who had experience or knowledge of the research topic, recruiting media sales managers because of their understanding of employee retention and turnover in Alabama media companies. For this study, participants consisted of sales managers who worked in the media industry and had experience decreasing voluntary employee turnover. The insights gained from sales managers can help other leaders develop effective retention strategies, avoiding expenses related with turnover, and improving relationships between employees and leaders (Cloutier et al., 2015).

The list of potential participants was gathered through known contacts of individuals who manage a salesforce in Alabama media companies. The number of potential participants continued to expand by asking current contacts for referrals and through the industry's professional association, Alabama Broadcasters Association. The identification and recruitment of additional participants beyond the initial list of participants continued until saturation was achieved, providing rich data. The participants were chosen based on their experience as sales managers for six Alabama media companies and knowledge of successful retention strategies. Participants were contacted via email and telephone to query their willingness to participate in the research study and evaluate if they met the research criteria.

I conducted one-on-one interviews with six sales managers of Alabama media companies. Major conglomerates in the United States own Alabama media companies. All the traditional broadcast networks, ABC, CBS, FOX, NBC, and The CW, are in the state’s metropolitan areas as well as cable advertising sales offices. Additionally, national radio companies are in the four metropolitan areas of the state. There are 10 different owners of commercial television stations and six separate owners of radio stations in Alabama. The presence of numerous media outlets in metropolitan areas of Alabama allowed for a meaningful number of participants in the qualitative study.

Participants were interviewed for 45-60 minutes without financial or in-kind compensation. The identified media sales managers who consented to inclusion in the research were permitted to leave the interview at any point during the process and were assured that they would not be penalized or suffer repercussions for not completing the interview session or changing their decision to participate. It was also integral to the quality of the research findings to establish a relationship between the participants and me, which started with obtaining their consent. As I have a reputation in the media industry that may not be known to all participants, I also disclosed my background, knowledge, and experience as a manager in the trade (see Yin, 2018). My role in the industry could have affected participants’ responses in field conversations that were avoided through multiple contacts in which trust was established. Revealing and discussing any concerns of participants at the beginning of the fieldwork helped establish rapport and trust. An additional benefit was my familiarity with the industry and the language that was useful during the data analysis process.

Research Method and Design

Qualitative research is used to explore the possible reasons for a phenomenon and what it meant to those involved. The selection of a research method is fundamental to an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (Williams & Moser, 2019). Different research methods are used to ensure that information derived from the research data accurately reflects the trustworthiness of the phenomena being investigated (Moon, 2019). For this study, a qualitative method and multiple case design was used to explore the successful strategies sales managers use to reduce the voluntary turnover of sales representatives.

Research Method

There are three research methods used by investigators: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Yin, 2018). I chose the qualitative method due to the nature of the overarching research question, allowing me to gain a deeper understanding of successful strategies that sales managers use to reduce the voluntary turnover of sales representatives. Qualitative researchers evaluate the thoughts and feelings of participants (Sutton & Austin, 2015), seeking to understand how social experiences are created and given meaning through an in-depth description of the phenomenon from the perspective of those involved (Zyphur & Pierides, 2017). Qualitative research allows researchers to explore human experiences in a personal and social context to gain a greater understanding of the factors influencing their experiences (Gelling, 2015).

Quantitative research is the method used to explain phenomena according to numerical data or statistics (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Quantitative research assumes a static reality that emphasizes measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables (Zyphur & Pierides, 2017). The quantitative method involves statistical analysis for hypothesis testing and the examination of relationships between dependent and interdependent variables (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Quantitative researchers use statistical models to explain what is observed. A quantitive approach was not appropriate for this study because the goal was to gain a deeper understanding of the voluntary turnover of sales representatives and not analyze numbers or test hypotheses. I eliminated a quantitative approach because numerically defining the causes of turnover does not provide insight into participants' experiences.

A mixed-method is a combination of quantitive and qualitative research techniques into a single study (Yin, 2018). Mixed-method research allows layering and flexibility in the integration of data collected from both qualitative and quantitative data (Panda et al., 2018). Researchers use a mixed-method approach to provide dimensionality and multiple measures of a common problem. Mixed-methods research requires the researcher to have skills, knowledge, and experience with both quantitative and qualitative methods (Halcomb & Hickman, 2015). The mixed-method approach is rarely conducted as a solo endeavor. A mixed-method approach was not appropriate for this study, as I do not possess the skills or experience to support both methods. Additionally, the overarching research question guiding the study does not require both a qualitative and quantitative approach. Because the study aimed to understand employee retention from the perspective of sales managers in the media industry who implemented successful retention strategies, a qualitative method was appropriate.

Research Design

Case study research facilitates exploration into a phenomenon using multiple data sources (Meyer, 2015). The primary goal of a case study is to develop an understanding of a single case or multiple cases. A case is a contemporary event that occurs within a real-life context (Ebneyamini & Sadeghi Moghadam, 2018; Yin, 2018) and has also been described as a bounded system (Harrison et al., 2017) or a single entity with boundaries (Fusch et al., 2017). A multiple case study design was chosen for this study to allow for a detailed data collection using multiple sources and to explore the research topic in depth.

In contrast, phenomenology is a qualitative method used to discover the meaning of lived experiences by individuals as they exist in the world (Qutoshi, 2018). The phenomenological approach is used to study phenomena as people experience them (Rodriguez & Smith, 2018). The objective of the phenomenology approach is to understand better how a specific phenomenon is experienced and given meaning (Van Manen, 2016). A phenomenological approach was not applicable to this study that aimed to explore successful retention strategies and not the lived experience of a population.

Another design is grounded theory, which is used to generate or discover a new theory. Grounded theory is a qualitative research design where a general explanation of a process, action, or interaction is shaped by the views of a large number of participants (Hemme et al., 2017). The purpose of this study was not to develop or generate new theory and included a small population; thus, grounded theory was deemed inappropriate for this study on voluntary employee turnover.

Additionally, ethnography was a potential design, which focuses on a cultural group that describes and interprets the shared and learned patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and language (Hitchings & Latham, 2020). Ethnography involves extended observations of the group where the researcher is immersed in the day-to-day lives of those being studied. An ethnography design was not appropriate for this study, as I did not intend to study a culture's values, beliefs, behaviors, and languages.

A multiple case study design was appropriate for this study as it allowed for a deeper understanding of the voluntary turnover of sales representatives. A case study design allows researchers to gather insightful data through interaction with real people. Researchers examine multiple cases when possible because multiple cases can strengthen a study's findings (Yin, 2018) understand differences and similarities that may exist between cases (Brink, 2018; Heale & Twycross, 2018). Researchers can analyze data derived from multiple cases that could provide stronger and more reliable evidence (Ridder, 2017). Additionally, multiple case studies allow for a more comprehensive exploration of the research question. A multiple case study offered an opportunity to compare similarities and differences of successful retention strategies used by sales managers in four metropolitan areas of Alabama.

Another consideration as part of the design was data saturation, which acts as evidence of rigor in qualitative research (Fusch & Ness, 2015). A researcher reaches data saturation at the point where no new themes, codes, or data emerge from the collected data (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Small sample sizes in qualitative research may produce information-rich data, and saturation is achieved. Therefore, the goal of six participants was appropriate for the study (Yin, 2018). One approach to achieve data saturation is by asking consistent questions to the correct population (Yin, 2016). I posed consistent questions to participants until no new themes, information, or codes emerged from the collected data. Fusch and Ness (2015) suggested that triangulation ensures data saturation. Triangulation involves collecting data from multiple sources (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Moon, 2019). I gathered data through semi-structured interviews and reviewed companies' public documentation.

Population and Sampling

The purpose of qualitative research is to enrich the understanding of an experience and to provide evidence through the accounts of those who lived the experience (Etikan et al., 2016). The selection of participants in a qualitative study is purposeful (Etikan et al., 2016). I used purposive sampling to select participants that met the selection criteria needed to answer the research question. I recruited participants that met the following criteria: sales manager of a media salesforce located in Alabama had three years of management experience, and had knowledge of successful strategies to reduce voluntary employee turnover.

The goal of purposive sampling was to identify individuals who could provide relevant descriptions of successful retention strategies. Purposive sampling is used in qualitative research to identify and select individuals who are knowledgeable about a phenomenon (Etikan et al., 2016). Valerio et al. (2016) posited that availability and participants' willingness and ability to articulate their experiences and opinions are key factors in purposeful sampling.

Determining the appropriate sample size for in-depth interviews is a critical step for qualitative studies. Rosenthal (2016) suggested that sampling for in-depth interviews concerns achieving a balance between the need for rich descriptions without sacrificing equal representation of experiences from the population. The number of participants could be small as they could provide accounts of the experience with different perspectives (Yin, 2016). The size of the sample is determined or achieved when new information is no longer gained from participants or saturation is reached. Boddy (2016) suggested a sample size of ten that represents a homogenous population could be adequate. However, data saturation could be noticeable after six in-depth interviews and evident after 12 in-depth interviews (Boddy, 2016). A sample size of six sales managers for this study on successful retention strategies used to reduce the voluntary turnover of sales representatives was appropriate. I ensured data saturation by interviewing participants until no new themes, data, and coding, as well as reaching the point where the study could be replicated. Researchers agreed on the general principles and concepts of concepts that include no new data, no new themes, no new coding, and the ability to replicate the study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Additionally, I ensured data saturation by asking participants the same interview questions. Fusch and Ness (2015) posited that data saturation would not be possible if different interview questions are posed to participants.

A list of possible participants who have experienced turnover and might be available for interviews was generated. As the list of potential participants was built, individuals were asked to share information with others who had knowledge of the experience and could take part in the study. The purpose of continuously soliciting individuals was to create a chain-referral sampling where potential participants would refer others for the study, a strategy known as snowballing (Marcus et al., 2017; Valerio et al., 2016). Potential participants were given questionnaires (Appendix A) to gain brief background information to ensure they met the study's requirements.

Individuals interested in participating in the research received an information package via email. If a person met the required criteria and agreed to take part in a one-on-one interview, the individual received a consent form and a demographic questionnaire (Appendix A) to complete before the interview. All participants had an opportunity to ask questions before signing the consent form and before the interview process. Interviews were held via a digital platform and audio recorded.

The one-to-one interviews were digitally recorded for accuracy using an iPhone X and the online platform, Zoom. During the one-on-one interviews, field notes were kept. Field notes will allow the researcher to maintain and comment on nonverbal cues, impressions, and participants' behavior (Sutton & Austin, 2015; Yin, 2016). Field notes can supply context for audio recordings that may not be obvious during the interview. In addition, they will serve as a reminder of factors that may be substantial during data analysis. Field notes could help the researcher construct thick, rich descriptions of the study context, the encounter, and the interview (Yin, 2016). Field notes could also be useful in data analysis by creating a record of how the study unfolded over time. Interviews can occur in different locations and at different times. The fluidity of the interview setting will require the interviewer to make decisions as to what settings are worth noting. The decision of what the researcher records will be part of the data collection procedure, although they may not all be notable events. Recording observations on multiple occasions reduce bias and will become a part of the findings and conclusion only if biases, cautions, or unique strengths affect the study (Yin, 2016).

Anticipating that unforeseen problems could arise during the data collection phase, potential participants were added to the database throughout the process. The remediation plan also consisted of using two recording devices and scheduling multiple weekly interviews. Each interviewee was expected to participate in two 45-60-minute interviews. Participants were informed of the time requirements and were willing to take part in the research.

Ethical Research

Researchers have an obligation to respect the rights, needs, values, and desires of participants in qualitative research (Yin, 2016). I upheld a strong sense of ethics at all touchpoints with participants. I implemented steps to protect individuals who participated in the research guided by the principles stipulated via Walden University's IRB and the *Belmont Report* (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2018). Participants were given numerical codes as identifiers to eliminate any mention of their identity. Individual media companies, network affiliation, and city location are not identified in the written study; instead, they are referred to as Alabama metropolitan areas. Participants were treated with confidentiality, respect, and as autonomous agents. Participants were given the ability to enter into the research voluntarily with adequate information. All parties involved in the research were treated in an ethical manner, and efforts were made to secure their well-being and identity.

Potential participants were sent an introductory email that explained the purpose of the study, the selection process, benefits, risks, and how their participation contributes to the study. Following the ethical standards set forth by Walden's IRB, the informed consent form was attached to the email. Informed consent is the process of gaining participants' approval to participate in the research (Ripley et al., 2018). Participants were encouraged to review the document, pose questions, and return the consent form via email or reply to the email with *I consent* before the interview. Barnham (2015) stipulated that researchers use an informed consent form to convey the risks and benefits and time commitment of the data collection to participants.

The researcher suspended biases through reflexivity and by communicating earlier experience and knowledge during data collection and analysis. The participants were informed of all data collection devices and activities. The informant had access to all written interpretations of interview responses, a technique referred to as member checking. Member-checking ensures the reliability and validity of the study (Simpson & Quigley, 2016).

The participants' rights, interests, and wishes were considered first when choices were made about data reporting. Participants were not referred to by their real names or any code that could be used to identify them (Yin, 2016). Numerical codes referenced participants, thus, eliminating referencing their identity from written or electronic records. Confidential data obtained from participants will be kept in a securely locked file cabinet located in the researcher’s home office. The researcher is the sole user and the only person who has access to the office. As prescribed by the IRB, any information that identifies participants or companies was eliminated by assigning codes to avoid affecting participants’ employment, reputation, physical, or mental health. Any information that negatively affects participants will be destroyed by the researcher using a cross-cut shredder at the end of five years. All data stored on electronic devices such as a USB will be erased using commercial software applications and physically destroyed.

The nature of the study did not include a vulnerable population. Thus, there was not an expectation of harm or risk to research participants. The identity of the participants was kept confidential by only collecting necessary information as a point of distinction and by assigning codes. Interviewees were treated with respect throughout the process and were not coerced into participating at any point. It was at the interviewee’s discretion to leave before completing the interview by voicing their intentions or via email. Participants were assured that they would not encounter any negative consequences if they chose not to participate. Participants were not provided with any form of allowances, incentives, or stipends for participating in the study.

The collection of identifiable data was kept to a minimum by removing all recognizable information to protect the study’s participants’ confidentiality. As required by the Walden University IRB, participants’ electronic data will be kept in a secure location for five years in password-protected devices and a locked cabinet only accessible by the researcher. After five years, all collected paper documentation will be destroyed using a cross-cut shredder. Data stored on memory devices will be erased using commercial software applications and physically destroyed.

Data Collection Instruments

In this study, I was the primary instrument used to collect information during semi-structured interviews. I collected, analyzed, and protected the data as outlined by Walden University's IRB. The goal of data collection for this study was to ask insightful and consistent questions to capture accurate and unbiased accounts of sales managers' experience in employee retention. It was essential to respect the privacy of the participants and provide an accurate review of all findings. Following a documented process, I analyzed the data and answered the overarching research question guiding this study.

An interview protocol (Appendix B) was used as an instrument of inquiry for conversation and to gather information related to the purpose of the study. There are four phases of the interview protocol that could help obtain robust and detailed interview data necessary to address the research question (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Weller et al., 2018). The phases are (1) ensuring interview questions are aligned with the research question; (2) creating an inquiry-based conversation, (3) interview feedback on protocols; and (4) piloting the interview protocol (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

To ensure interview questions are aligned with the research questions, the first phase of the interview protocol could increase the usefulness of the interview questions and eliminate any unnecessary questions (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The second phase, creating an inquiry-based conversation, involves developing a variety of questions with follow-up questions that are easily understood by participants (Weller et al., 2018). Receiving feedback, the next phase, on the interview protocol enhances the instrument's reliability and ensures that the interview questions are understood by participants (Weller et al., 2018). Lastly, piloting the interview protocol, the researcher tests the research instrument to get a realistic view of how long the interview takes and if participants can answer the interview questions (Skinner & Gormley, 2016). To enhance the reliability and validity of the data collection process, I used member checking. Member checking involves the researcher presenting the interpretations to participants as a method to ensure that their experience has been accurately captured and guard against the researcher’s bias.

Data Collection Technique

In this study, I was the primary instrument used to collect information through semi-structured interviews. I collected, analyzed, and protected the data as outlined by Walden University’s IRB. The goal of data collection for this study is to ask insightful and consistent questions to capture accurate and unbiased accounts of sales managers’ experience in employee retention. It is essential to respect the privacy of the participants and provide an accurate review of all findings. The semi-structured interviews were the primary source of data. In addition to the interviews, I reviewed documents supplied by the participants that supported interview data and aided in understanding the study’s focus. I used the interview data, public documentation, company documents, and journal notes to achieve methodological triangulation of this study. Following a documented process, I analyzed the data and answered the overarching research question guiding this study.

There are advantages and disadvantages to the use of semi-structured interviews and the review of company data. An advantage of semi-structured interviews is the opportunity for the researcher to observe participants' body language and facial expressions (Bullock, 2016; Kazan et al., 2018). Semi-structured interviews are firsthand accounts of the participants' experience providing an in-depth understanding of the issue (Helle et al., 2017; McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Semi-structured interviews offer an opportunity for the researcher to rephrase interview questions that could enhance the clarity of the responses (Cole & Harbour, 2015). A disadvantage of semi-structured interviews is the participants' reluctance to share data fully. Stage and Manning (2015) indicated researchers might find company data do not support interview responses. Participants might have imperfect recall of past experiences or could be selective in the data they provide (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

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I used member checking as a method to enhance the study’s reliability and validity. Qualitative researchers are both data collectors and data analysts that could potentially impose bias. As a method to reduce researcher bias, researchers involve participants to check and confirm data interpretation. Confirmation is achieved by returning the analyzed data to participants for verification, addition, and modification. Member checking is used to validate, verify, or assess the trustworthiness of the data (Birt et al., 2016). Birt et al. suggested that member checking enhances rigor in qualitative research. Using member checking as a means to strengthen rigor, I scheduled a second interview with participants to focus on the confirmation, modification, and verification of the data interpretation. Birt et al. (2016) recommended that studies undertaken to understand experiences and behaviors and potentially change practices should involve participants.

Retention policies defined by scholars and practitioners will be used to detect successful retention strategies of media sales managers. Well-functioning employee retention strategies include multiple variables (Swaneh and Kamara, 2019). For organizational success, retention strategies that concentrate on cultivating workers, company merited incentive programs, work-life balance policies, and a harmonized working atmosphere are essential. Additionally, the partnership between sales managers and salespeople profoundly impacts the decision of the employee to remain or leave the company. By promoting and encouraging employees' career growth and advancement, leaders build trusting relationships (Wang & Chen, 2017). Successful retention techniques include opportunities for management coaching, open communication, and creating an environment where ideas are encouraged to be expressed by salespeople. Sales managers show support to sales reps by communicating the vision and priorities of the organization, involving salespeople in the implementation of sales targets, and acknowledging the accomplishments of employees. When engaged in the whole process, workers experience more meaningful work and are embedded in the organization (Ferreira et al., 2017). I reviewed company documents that disclosed the amount of time sales representatives have worked with the organization to support data generated from interviews with sales managers.

Data Organization Technique

Data organization is essential to manage large volumes of information generated through interviews, observations, or documents. For this research study, the organization of data included an audio recording of interviewee responses, member checking, and the qualitative software QDA Miner Lite. QDA Miner Lite allows researchers to organize and analyze a wide array of data (Zorić & Stojanov, 2018). Zorić and Stojanov (2018) posited that QDA Miner Lite provides researchers with support to manage information, disclose themes, query and code unstructured data. Kris and David (2020) suggested that QDA Miner Lite automatically extracts the researcher's highlighted text that can be presented as participants' quotes. The highlighted text allows the researcher to cross-check the participants' meaning to the theme and sub-theme category. Data organization enables the researcher to review information for concepts and themes easily. Qualitative researchers employ various methods to organize collected data through coding (Oliveira et al., 2016; Williams & Moser, 2019). Coding is defined as a structural operation for qualitative research that enables data analysis and successive steps to serve the purpose of the study (Williams & Moser, 2019).

Data were gathered from participants' interviews by asking specific questions. The interviews were audio-recorded to capture participants' responses accurately. The interviewees' responses were transcribed and entered in QDA Miner Lite to generate outcomes that could answer the overall research question. Yin (2018) recommended that case study researchers store documents electronically and establish a system to categorize data. To protect the confidentiality of participants, I assigned codes as a method to distinguish interviewees. The data gathered from participants will be stored for five years on a password-protected computer and USB drive. The consent forms will be placed in a locked safe located in my private office. Data storage includes audio recording, interview transcripts, researcher notes, and consent forms. Documents will be stored for five years. After five years, documents will be deleted from electronic devices and destroyed using a cross-cut shredder.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis begins with a general overview of the information gathered from interviews. Qualitative data analysis is inductive, whereby the analyst identifies relevant categories in the data (Yin, 2016). Throughout the process, I coded data using as many categories as possible to identify and describe patterns and themes from the perspective of the participants (Yin, 2016). The data was reviewed to understand and explain patterns and themes. The use of digital recordings and field notes during the data analysis process helped strengthen reliability and internal validity (Skinner & Gormley, 2016). To increase the reliability of the study's results, I used methodological triangulation. Methodological triangulation involves collecting data from multiple sources within the same data collection method or between methods (Fusch et al., 2018). I used methodological triangulation by collecting data from multiple sources that included semi-structured interviews, company documents, and public documentation. Yin (2018) recommended that a major strength in case study data collection is the ability to use more than one source of evidence. Methodological triangulation is one method used by qualitative researchers to explore different levels and perspectives of the same phenomenon and ensure the study results' validity (Fusch et al., 2018). The data was reviewed with an open mind regarding the participant's point of view.

Field notes were created to remember and record behaviors, activities, and other observations (Schwandt, 2015). The researcher's field notes are intended to be read as reminders of observations noted during the interview process (Schwandt, 2015). Notes taken during interviews are typically cryptic and incomplete, as the focus should be on the interview. Reflecting on field notes soon after the interview allows the researcher to recall nonverbal cues or signals that could reveal additional information or the need for further clarification. Continuously examining notes could also provide an opportunity for the researcher to tighten data collection through verification activities (Yin, 2016). A verification technique used by qualitative researchers is member checking. After the initial interview, researchers summarize the data and provide participates with a summary of the data interpretation. Participants were provided the opportunity to review the summary for verification and accuracy. Thus, member checking serves to decrease the incidence of incorrect data and incorrect interpretation of the data (Cole & Harbour, 2015).

I followed the five steps stipulated by Yin (2016) in the data analysis process. Compiling information from field notes into a useful format similar to a database is the first step in data analysis, as stipulated by Yin (2016). The purpose of this step is to organize notes into a systematic form before the formal analysis begins. The data is compiled into smaller fragments that are considered a dissembling procedure. This step entails assigning labels or codes to the different fragments and may be different from the initial labels assigned in the first step. Continuously reviewing field notes, the data becomes more familiar, and distinctive features of the study will be more readily recognized.

Additionally, the researcher will be able to ascertain how the data relates to research questions as field notes are reviewed. Once codes or labels have been assigned, data will be reassembled, forming potentially a different list of common themes. The fourth phase of data analysis involves interpreting the reassembled data that will become the key analytic portion of the research. At this point in the process, the data will continuously be sifted and sorted to find patterns. Lastly, the final phase is referred to as concluding (Yin, 2016). During this phase, conclusions are derived from the researcher's entire study. I focused on key themes that correlated to the literature from peer-reviewed journals, new studies published since writing the proposal, and tied to the study's conceptual framework. De Loo et al. (2015) suggested that researchers use core themes from company documents and participant interviews to support or provide new insight into the case study.

A computer software QDA Miner Lite was used to organize text into a meaningful form for identifying, retrieving, isolating, grouping, and regrouping data. Using QDA software, the process of compiling data from field notes and recorded interviews will build codes relevant to the study's conceptual framework that will help organize the data more formally (Yin, 2016). The software will help identify keywords and emerging facts derived from the data. From the data, groupings will be formed whereby conclusions may be made that are related to the research question.

Reliability and Validity

Establishing validity and reliability in qualitative research supported the study's findings. Validity refers to the integrity and application of the research method of a study, while reliability describes consistency in analytical procedures (Noble & Smith, 2015). The most common criteria used to evaluate qualitative research are credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and authenticity (Birt et al., 2016).

Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency of research practices that is transparent. Kihn and Ihantola (2015) suggested that reliability means that the researcher adopted appropriate and reliable research methods and procedures. Morse (2015a) described reliability as dependability, consistency, and/or repeatability of the research data collection, interpretations, and analysis. Reliability refers to results that remain the same if the study was repeated. Leung (2015) argued that the variability of results is tolerated in qualitative studies, provided that the methodology used yielded similar results. I kept meticulous documentation and reporting to allow the reader to assess how data were collected, produced, and interpreted. Developing a protocol for qualitative research is essential for rigor (Amankwaa, 2016). Amankwaa stipulated that a protocol is a set of planned activities used by the researcher as a guide for trustworthiness activities.

The dependability of a study requires the researcher to focus on the reliability of the data used in the study. Dependability in a qualitative study refers to the consistency of the data over similar conditions (Twining et al., 2017). A detailed description of data collection, how categories are established, and how decisions are made throughout the study establishes research dependability. I will keep detailed records of the data collection and data analysis process and how decisions are made to establish dependability. Additionally, I will use member checking to ensure the dependability of the study. Member checking used in a qualitative inquiry seeks to improve the interview's accuracy, credibility, and validity. Member checking provides an opportunity for participants to review the researcher's interpretation of their statements for accuracy. If the participant agrees that the summaries reflect their views, the study is deemed credible.

Validity

Leung (2015) suggested that validity refers to the appropriateness of the tools, processes, and data chosen for the study. The research question should be appropriate for the desired outcome and the choice of methodology to answer the research question. The design should also be appropriate based on the methodology and reflected in the findings to increase the study's validity.. Validity is also supported by the sampling procedures (Leung, 2015). I chose a qualitative multiple case study to answer the overarching research question: what strategies do sales managers use to reduce the voluntary turnover of sales representatives? For this study, purposive sampling will be used to identify sales managers who have experience implementing successful retention strategies to reduce the voluntary turnover of sales representatives.

A member checking technique will be used to ensure internal validity. Member checking refers to the participant serving as a checkpoint throughout the analysis process (Birt et al., 2016). Member checking is achieved through continuous dialogue with subjects regarding the interpretation of their reality and meanings. Any known biases will be articulated in writing through reflexivity. Reflexivity is the process of continuous internal dialogue, critical self-evaluation, and recognition of the researcher's prior knowledge and experience that may affect the research process and outcome (Berger, 2015). I will ensure data saturation when no new information or themes is obtained from participants. Participants will be asked the same open-ended questions to ensure further data saturation. Researchers use open-ended questions to achieve data saturation (Fusch et al., 2018; Morse, 2015). According to Fusch and Ness (2015), data saturation is reached when there is enough information to replicate the study, when the ability to obtain additional new information has been attained, and when further coding is no longer feasible.

Credibility

Credibility denotes the truth of the data or views of the participants. Twining et al. (2017) stated that the researchers' interpretation and representation of the participants' views enhance credibility. Furthermore, if the human experience description is recognizable by other individuals that share the same experience, the qualitative study is considered credible. The decision of transferability of the study results is left to the reader's discretion (Fusch & Ness, 2015). One method of determining the transferability of a credible study, the reader compares the study to a situation that they perceive as familiar. If the situation is similar, it is possible the results can be transferred.

This study will include a multiple case study design representing different perspectives and where similarities and differences are denoted to enhance credibility. Connelly (2016) suggested that credibility is established through member-checking and reflective journaling. To further establish credibility, I will use member-checking and methodological triangulation. Member-checking refers to participants checking and confirming descriptions and interpretations of their accounts about the phenomenon being studied (Birt et al., 2016). Methodological triangulation is the use of data from multiple sources. Thus, I will use data from participants' interviews, company documents, and public websites. I will adhere to the interview protocol, engage participants in member checking, and utilize methodological triangulation to reach data saturation that ensures credible findings.

Qualitative researchers must acknowledge personal biases. A reflective journal enables researchers to discuss their position in the study and how experiences and beliefs could influence the research findings. An audit procedure will also be used that provides a trail of choices and decisions that can be checked by others. An audit process increases the quality and transparency of the study's conclusions (de Kleijn & Van Leeuwen, 2018). I will document the entire research process, including data gathering, data analysis, and my position or biases as the research instrument.

Confirmability

Conformability describes the degree or extent that the study findings are shaped by the participants and not by the researcher's biases, motivation, and interest (Amankwaa, 2016). Researchers use an audit trail, triangulation, and reflexivity to establish confirmability (Birt et al., 2016). An audit trail describes the research steps from the beginning of the research project to its conclusion (Amankwaa, 2016). Triangulation is one of four methods Fusch et al. (2018) recommended for confirmability. Triangulation is the examination of various sources to support the consistency of data. I will use multiple data collection sources, including semi-structured interviews and company documents.

Transferability

Cypress (2017) stipulated that researchers seek to transfer findings to other cases or settings by future researchers. This study will explore the successful strategies sales managers use to reduce the voluntary turnover of sales representatives in Alabama media companies. The collected data may affect the transferability of the findings to other industries and geographical locations. To improve the transferability of the findings, I will keep a detailed description of data collection and analysis, participants, and the research processes. Moon et al. (2016) suggested that it is up to the reader to determine transferability to another case, context, or setting.

Transition and Summary

Section 1 includes an introduction to the problem media sales managers encounter when they lack successful retention strategies to reduce the voluntary turnover of sales representatives. Section 2 consists of strategies and the chosen methodology for this study. The section also includes the purpose statement, the role of the researcher, the participants, a description of the research method and design, population and sampling, data instrument, data collection, and data analysis. I discussed methods to ensure reliability, validity, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity. Section 3 will include the presentation of the findings, application to professional practices, implications for social change recommendations for further study, my reflections, and the conclusion of 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 that sales managers use to reduce the voluntary turnover of sales representatives. I conducted semistructured interviews with six sales managers from Alabama media companies. I used a structured interview protocol for each participant as a guide and recorded, transcribed, and analyzed each interview by themes using LMX theory. I analyzed the recorded interviews using QDA Miner Lite to create codes, identify themes, and analyze the data. I also reviewed company public documentation to ensure methodological triangulation and provided each participant a summary of my interpretation of their responses for review and validation. The findings revealed retention strategies that media sales managers use to reduce sales representatives' voluntary turnover. The themes that emerged were (a) person-organization fit, (b) supportive work environment, (c) effective communication, and (d) recognition and rewards.

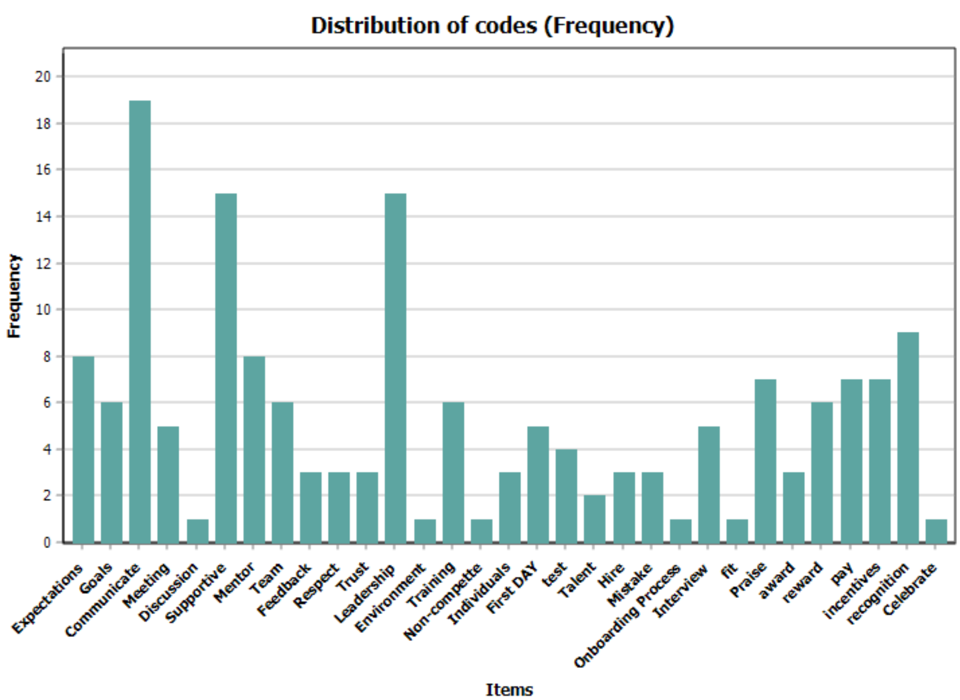
Presentation of the Findings

I developed the following research question to help gain an in-depth understanding of the successful retention strategies that media sales managers use to reduce the voluntary turnover of sales representatives: What strategies do sales managers use to reduce the voluntary turnover of sales representatives? I interviewed six media sales managers of Alabama media companies who had experience developing and implementing successful retention strategies to reduce the voluntary turnover of sales representatives. Saturation was achieved after Participant 5, but an additional interview was conducted to ensure no additional information or themes were introduced, and there was enough information to replicate the study (see Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Participants contributed insight regarding successful strategies for reducing sales representatives' voluntary turnover. Figure 2 shows the key terms derived from the data analysis. As stated, the four themes that emerged from the analyzed data were (a) person-organization fit, (b) supportive work environment, (c) effective communication, and (d) recognition and rewards. The longevity of the sales staff noted the success of retention strategies, with representative tenure ranging between 5 and 20 years. Although the participants stipulated that there was no formal process used to track turnover at their level, it was discernable due to the small size of the salesforce.

Figure 2

Key Terms from Data Analysis



Theme 1: Person-Organization Fit

The first theme identified from the data was the person-organization fit. Employees' fit or misfit to the job and organization influences their intention to leave or remain with the company (Berisha & Lajçi, 2020). Person-organization fit leads to an increased bond between the employee and the organization (Jin et al., 2018), which makes it more difficult for the employee to leave the organization even when a better offer is presented. Four of the six participants discussed hiring the right candidate that fits the job function and the organization's culture as a primary retention strategy. Participant 4 noted,

> we have done it by making sure we have a good candidate whose talent fits the work that has to be performed and then secondly that they're a good fit for the culture of the team and the company. And sometimes you have really talented people, but they're just not a good fit for the company. And if you make that mistake and you get excited about somebody who's really talented, but the way the culture works is going to rub them the wrong way, and you're not going to have that person very long. You don't want to make that mistake.

Participant 1 explained,

> they don't have to be the prettiest person in the room, but how one carries themselves and how they speak how they pronounce their words even. You don't have to be the most educated person in the room. But, but you gotta be able to carry on a conversation with the most educated person in the room. Because in sales you're going to have a wide variety of clients.

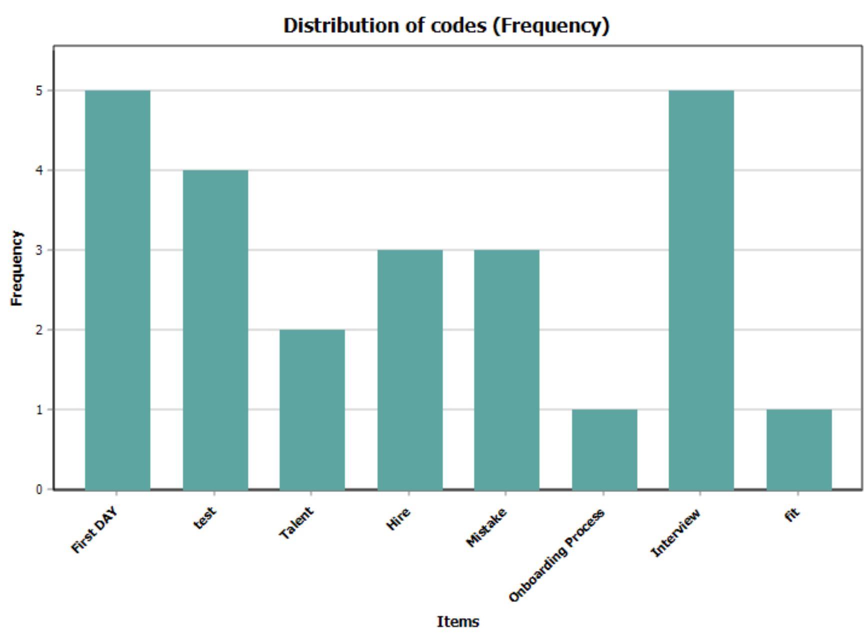
Participant 3 emphasized,

> day one is onboarding. We also have a video from our, from the president of our television division that they watched just to feel, like, who we are. And we're a big, big, big, big, big company. But it makes them feel like they're part of it, they're part of a good organization that's what I think, that's number one.

Figure 3 outlines the frequency of key terms associated with a person-organization fit stated by the participants during the semistructured interviews. For example, participants mentioned the term *interview* and *right hire* as a strategy to identify employees as a person-organization fit.

Figure 3

Key Terms Associated with Person-Organization Fit



As part of this theme, it is important for managers to have adequate measures for selecting and evaluating new hires (Cho & Song, 2017). The recruitment and selection of a sales representative involve identifying the appropriate person to perform the job duties (Anyanwu et al., 2019). It is important for organizations that rely on sales to attract and retain successful salespeople who fit well with the organization (Lu et al., 2015). Eighty-five percent of sales managers used a sales talent assessment to help make hiring decisions during the selection process (Center for Sales Strategy, 2020). Participant 2, Participant 4, and Participant 5 discussed using an external company to assess the suitability of potential employees through a personality test. Participant 3 stated that they also use personality tests to identify the best person-job fit after interviewing prospective employees: “I will tell you that when we, you know, we interview everyone, and we actually personality test everyone.” Participant 2 agreed,

> we also use a program…. that we pre-qualify candidates that rate them on a lot of different attributes. So, based on how they score with that, we know two things: one, you know, are they a fit for the job to begin with. Number two, the areas where we can help and steer and how they need to be managed going forward, based on the personality profile.

Company leaders who used talent assessments have found the test accurate or very accurate at predicting future success (Center for Sales Strategy, 2020). Participant 1 also found

> a personal interview is the best tool because in that interview, I stress what I expect, require all my salespeople. I’ll watch for their body language, and I listened closely to their feedback. I forewarn them about some stuff and, a lot of times weed some of them out during the interview process.

Participant 2 agreed that “first and foremost, I think when it comes to turnover you know the process obviously starts with the interview, and when you bring somebody on board.” These recruitment strategies can avoid the significant percentage of turnover attributed to hiring mistakes (Chowdhury-Abdullah & Hasan, 2017). Therefore, the recruitment process is fundamental to employee retention (Johennesse & Chou, 2017). The secret to a great sales force is hiring and promoting, emphasizing hiring people that fit the company’s culture, coaching, training, and holding salespeople accountable.

During my review of company documents found in the public domain, I also discovered organizational leaders’ statements that collaborated with the collected data. Participant 2’s company leaders expressed their commitment to building a culture of success by attracting and retaining the best talent in the market. Participant 3 company’s website disclosed that as employees, they are connected with something larger than themselves by working on projects that inspire change in the world. A document shared by one participant revealed their mission statement and goal of acquiring talent who shared their values and belief in the company’s vision.

The study’s finding that employee retention is affected by person-organization fit is supported by recent studies (Ghielen et al., 2020). Employees respond favorably to environments that meet their specific needs, enable them to use their talents, and reinforce and affirm their values. Workers gain a sense of importance and value due to management support, which could help improve the relationship between employees and the organization’s leaders (Dhir & Dutta, 2020). Person-organization fit is linked to work attitudes, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions (Sørlie et al., 2020).

The person-organization fit theme also aligned with the conceptual framework, the LMX theory. Person-organization fit represents the compatibility between the individual and the organization (Seong & Choi, 2019), which is positively associated with quality LMX relationships (Boon & Biron, 2016). The considerable focus on person-organization fit is its use in predicting job attitudes, satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intention. LMX provides a lens for managers to instill corporate values in employees and signal the degree to which their values match those of the organization (Tremblay et al., 2017). Four of the six participants agreed that the person-organization fit successfully reduced sales representatives' voluntary turnover.

Theme 2: Supportive Work Environment

A supportive work environment emerged as the second theme for reducing the voluntary turnover of sales representatives. Eighty percent of employees desire to work in a healthy and supportive work environment (Naz et al., 2020). A supportive work environment increases employee retention (Kundu & Lata, 2017). Participant 3 confirmed that a supportive work environment is essential for employee retention:

> I'm a huge believer in mentors. But, I never assign a mentor. I actually say to our new sellers, come in observe for a little while and then find the salesperson that best fits your personality, that best fits your style, and then go to them and ask them if they would mentor you. So as opposed to a push down it's a, it's organic.

Participant 1 affirmed Participant 3's perspective: "We are all human. And we all seek approval and acceptance from everyone in our lives. Salespeople are no exception." Participant 4 suggested,

> People who don't feel like they have a good supportive manager never come to the manager for help. They'll go, they'll go out of their way to try, to try not to talk to the manager when they need help.

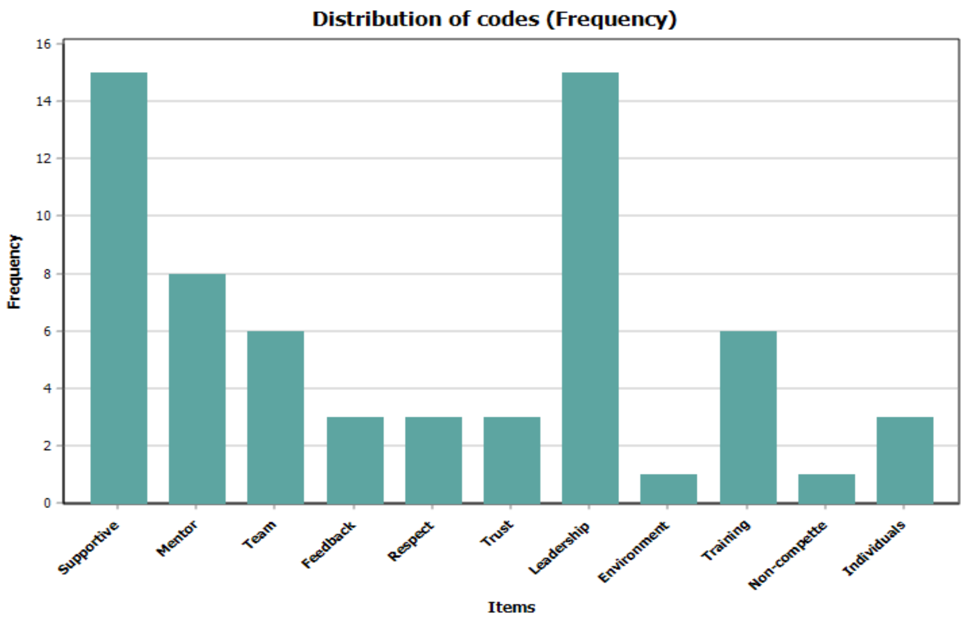
Participant 6 emphasized that representatives need to feel they are part of the process. "You also want to let them know that they're part of the process, that they can be a part of the decision-making process, give them some ownership and the final answer." Participant 5 added,

> If someone's out of the office, I'm not too good in my leadership role to maybe go in and do some clerical work to help make this happen. You know if someone gets an order or somebody needs to make a change to a commercial or changes to some creative or to a digital, digital campaign. It trickles down. So, I think it trickles down from the president of the company to the salespeople. So everyone pitches in, and everyone is recognized. This is a team effort.

Figure 4 illustrates the frequency of the terms participants discussed regarding a supportive work environment. A supportive environment has important implications in the sales context because of the stressful nature of sales positions and the need for organizational support (Meintjes & Hofmeyr, 2018). Salespeople who perceive the lack of support experience diminished job involvement and identification with the organization.

Figure 4

Key Terms Associated with a Supportive Work Environment



I also reviewed company documents, such as the mission statement and employee videos. Participant 3's employees' videos affirmed the company's supportive work environment. Participant 5's diversity and inclusion statement espouses their goal for employees to be seen, heard, and valued through awareness and empathy. One employee shared that mentorship provided advice and support in the office and life. A supportive work environment demonstrates that managers care, and the individual's contributions are valued.

Research underscored the participants' beliefs that a work-friendly environment with visible support from supervisors creates a positive impression among employees (Yusliza et al., 2020). A common belief of voluntary turnover is that employees do not quit their companies; they quit their bosses (Mathieu et al., 2016). Employees leave organizations for many reasons, including low salaries and poor benefits; however, the most common reason cited in the research is ineffective managers (Bake, 2019). Participant 1 indicated, “It matters not if your company selling widgets services or even advertising, leadership must create a positive environment for sales folks because these guys are hitting that road every day and getting rejected.” The participant indicated that salespeople in particular “probably have to endure more rejection than any other segment of any business.” Participant 4 suggested that managers must treat salespeople with respect, adding,

> we want to be collaborative versus you know, barking orders. You don’t really command people and order people around; you really have to be able to get them to do things for their reasons, not your reasons, and treat them like adults.

Participant 3 confirmed the statements of Participant 1 and Participant 4, “for me, the final way, as I said, the door is always open. I manage by wandering around.” Participant 5 added, “I practice what I preach. So, it’s a very open-door policy. If someone has concerns, I want them to feel comfortable coming to me with that. I believe that leaders should set an example, practice what they preach.” Sales representatives are often the channel through which companies generate revenue. The selling process involves constant stress that includes competing with competitors, meeting sales targets, and dealing with rejection. Thus, sales representatives are more likely to succeed when they feel supported rather than directed (Meintjes & Hofmeyr, 2018).

Additionally, a supportive work environment allows employees to make mistakes and to view these as learning opportunities. Participant 3 encourages sales representatives to make mistakes:

> I'm trying to do something and trying to do something better or trying to do something different, and if I make a mistake, I'm the first to admit it. I actually encourage people to get out there and take a swing. You know there is a saying that the best thing you can do is make the right decision, the second-best thing you can do is make the wrong decision, the worst thing you can do is not make it.

Participant 4 emphasized the importance of language when dealing with sales representatives and challenging situations:

> The kind of language you use when you're dealing with tough situations, how you direct people, how you guide them. Do you make them feel stupid when they make a mistake? Do you make them feel stupid when you give an answer to something, or do you create an environment that feels safe to say I don't know? I don't understand.

Participant 4 added,

> If your philosophy is that you know people need to be treated with respect, people need to, need to be in a learning environment, a place where people will feel safe, in terms of learning and growing. Then the person at the top has to have that belief and higher. According to that belief, so that it's, their philosophy is reflected in all the departments across the market. You know, all the people who carry a manager title should be able to walk and talk that way, and that's the cool

> part of their core belief. So if you do that, then the culture of the organization is going to feel good. It's going to feel warm; it's going to feel great. When people walk in, they can feel it.

Participant 2 agreed that it was essential to support sales representatives when they did not meet expectations or goals. "If somebody's not making their goals, you know it's about helping them find the path to be able to do that." Meintjes and Hofmeyr (2018) disclosed that sales representatives often work outside of the organization in a complex environment that may accentuate the need for organizational support. Sales managers should often access their quality and level of support towards representatives.

Holland et al. (2017) argued that trust between employees and supervisors is the foundation of the relationship. Trust between management and employee is central to quality relationships, cooperation, and stability. Participant 6 confirmed the researchers' argument regarding trust. "I think the best way to develop our process is, to be honest… once they see if you say something, you're going to do it, and you're about to follow through." Participant 2 agreed that straightforward honest is integral to developing trust. "This one is, it's really all about straightforward honesty." Participant 4 believed that, over time, managers build trust and respect with sales representatives through their actions. "I've had people willing to share because they can trust that they know that whatever they say is going to be taken seriously." Participant 2 added, "that support that's there, I think, is what makes a difference in the end." Employees who believe their leaders are concerned about their welfare are likely to engage with the leader. An absence of trust could prohibit exchanging information between the leader and followers (Hasel & Grover, 2017).

Recent research confirmed that a supportive work climate has a positive and meaningful relationship with employee retention (Naz et al., 2020). The findings of Yusliza et al.'s (2020) study showed a clear and positive connection between a supportive work environment and employee retention. Employees' perceptions of a company's positive atmosphere have an impact on their decision to stay. Ngotngamwong (2020) suggested that managers make greater efforts to be more approachable, supportive, and open-minded to influence workers to remain with the company. When workers develop personal identification with their superiors, they form a stronger bond with them, more respect for them, and a willingness to imitate their actions (Badrinarayanan et al., 2020). A positive work climate could influence employee satisfaction. Employee retention has a direct and positive association with a supportive work environment.

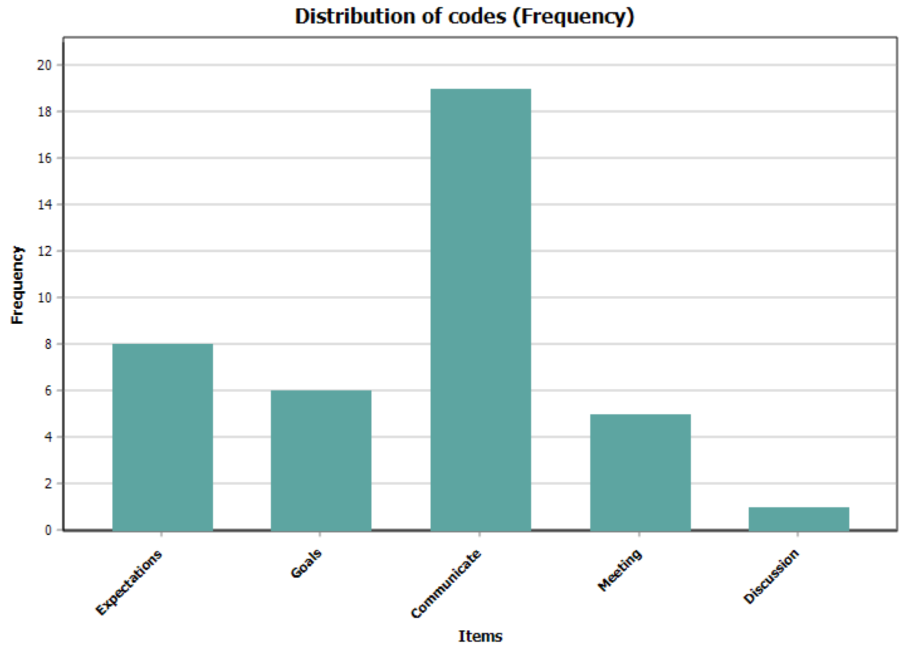
The supportive work environment theme aligned with the LMX theory. LMX theory proposes that leaders develop relationships of varying quality with members (Byun et al., 2017). In high-quality LMX, leaders and members exchange implicit and explicit resources and support. Byun et al. (2017) suggested that mutual trust played a decisive role in determining high-quality relationships. Employees experience a close relationship with leaders who tend to be inclusive (Javed et al., 2018). Javed et al. (2018) discussed that inclusive managers build trust and work as a team to support each other. A high-quality LMX relationship represents exchanges with a high level of confidence, consideration, and mutual obligation. The six participants agreed that a supportive work environment where leaders develop relationships with all sales representatives contributes to lower employee turnover. Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) refer to the third phase of relationship building as the mature phase, where there is mutual trust, respect, and obligation towards each other. The relationship described by the participants aligns with LMX description of a mature phase where a high degree of reciprocity exists between the parties. Manata (2020) supported the responses of the participants. Supervisors who develop equitable relationships with all subordinates can promote task coordination and unity, which creates a cohesive and productive working environment.

Theme 3: Effective Communication

The interviews revealed that Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, Participant 4, Participant 5, and Participant 6 used effective communication as a strategy to reduce voluntary employee turnover. Adil and Awais (2016) viewed effective communication as a strategy that reduced employee turnover. Effective communication leads to interpersonal relationships, and interpersonal relationships cultivate employee commitment. Radovic Markovic and Salamzadeh (2018) found that managers must be effective communicators that allow and encourage free-flowing communication. Figure 5 shows the frequency of terms participants used to convey effective communication as an integral retention strategy. Managers must communicate organizational goals to employees and, through that communication, inspire employees to trust their leadership and perform at the highest levels possible. Contrarily, sales representatives view managers' communication skills as recognition of their individuality or as individuals.

Figure 5

Key Terms Associated with Effective Communication



The six participants agreed that effective communication was essential to motivate sales representatives to remain with the company. Participant 1 posited that effective communication starts during the interview phase, where expectations of job responsibilities are shared. Participant 3 found being brutally honest with future employees regarding what is expected is key to retention. “You know, in my position, I’m brutally honest with them and just say this is a this is a tough, tough, tough, tough job. Sort of like the Marine Corps, right? It’s the hardest thing you’re ever going to do.” Johennesse and Chou (2017) stipulated that the recruitment process is fundamental to employee retention. Participant 3 viewed the representative’s first day on the job as crucial for communicating company goals, expectations and helping the employee feel part of the organization. Radovic Markovic and Salamzadeh (2018) emphasized that establishing clear expectations, yearly goals, and providing continuous feedback were essential to motivating sales representatives to remain with the company.

The six participants indicated that weekly one-on-one meetings with representatives were an integral part of their retention process. Participant 6 agreed that weekly one-on-one meetings are held to discuss sales pending, sales closes, and sales challenges.

> In addition to the weekly one-on-one sessions, quarterly, we have an evaluation where we discuss did you meet your quarterly goals? That's where the benchmarks are discussed. There is always ongoing open communication, where there is one-on-one time, and at any given time, someone can walk into my office to talk to me. But, there is always a dedicated one-on-one time.

Participant 5 stated that policies are communicated to sales representatives from the onboarding process and throughout their tenure at the company. "It's a part of the onboarding process. So, if anybody ever wanted to go back to it and see it within the policies. We do have an internal website like I think a lot of companies have now, where you can go and see benefits…. lots of times it is discussed in the weekly one on ones." A participant shared a calendar that showed scheduled appointments that confirmed weekly meetings with sales representatives. One-on-one time with management ensures that sales representatives feel heard and valued (Brown et al., 2019)

Participant 2 believed that straightforward, honest communication was vital to effective communication. The participant "encourage people, you know, to be completely straightforward honesty because it's how we receive the full benefit as well, you know, from everybody that comes in and out of our building. Lai and Yang (2017) confirmed that formal information-sharing increases the visibility of team activities and is related to team satisfaction.

Effective communication strengths the connections between stakeholders and leaders, resulting in lower employee turnover and higher employee satisfaction (Condruz-Bacescu, 2020). Mayfield and Mayfield (2017) confirmed that frequent communication between managers and employees increased employee commitment. A participant's company website revealed sales managers must have excellent communication skills, both oral and written. Another company's website specified that market managers are responsible for building a culture of success by attracting and retaining the best talent in the market. Effective communication decreases turnover by helping employees understand the organization's mission and objectives (Murray et al., 2018).

Recent research confirmed the study's findings that effective communication and encouragement by leaders improve employee satisfaction and retention (Tian et al., 2020). Communication is essential for motivating workers, measuring success, delivering goods and services, and improving employee efficiency. Employee output and performance and employee loyalty are significantly increased when leaders and employees communicate effectively (Kalogiannidis, 2020). Employees feel respected, inspired, and rewarded for their contributions to organizational performance and improvement due to successful communication (Tian et al., 2020). The recent research revealed that good communication in any business organization has a significant impact on employee success. Businesses are encouraged to maintain a good flow of knowledge to increase employee efficiency and long-term business profitability.

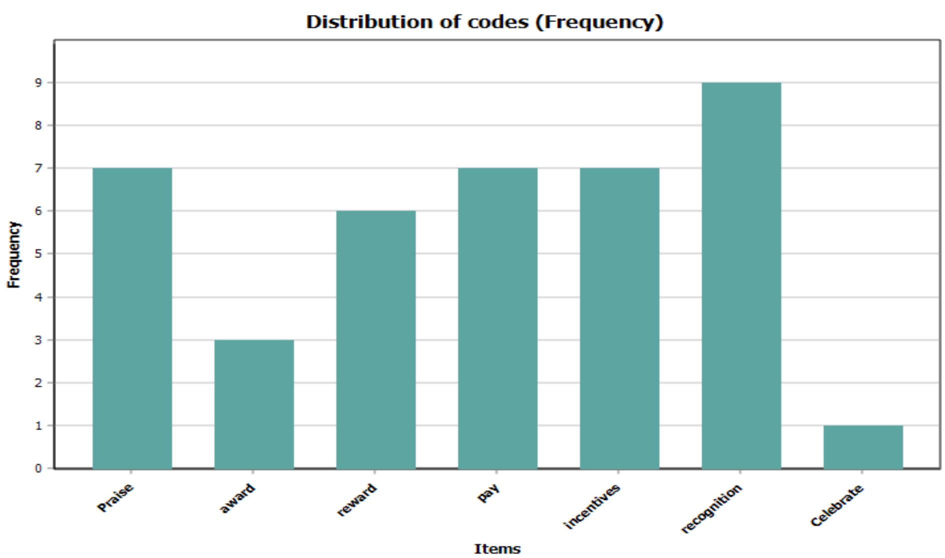
The theme of effective communication aligns with the conceptual framework of this study. Leaders use communication as an instrument to build healthy and productive relationships with employees (Brown et al., 2019). The LMX theory espouses that a relationship between leaders and followers is generated through exchanges during their daily interactions. These exchanges could be viewed as communicative acts such as instructions, orders, explanations, and vision sharing, reducing turnover (Brown et al., 2019). The findings confirmed the research of Chen and Wei (2020), who noted that high-quality LMX relationships promote employees' economic, social and psychological needs and are more likely to lead to retention.

Theme 4: Rewards and Recognition

The fourth theme that emerged from the data collection was rewards and recognition. Kundu and Lata (2017) recognized that organizational leaders retain employees through reward, recognition, and respect. Recognition and rewards could improve efficiency, reduced absenteeism, pleasurable work environments, and higher earnings. The participants acknowledged that rewards and recognition were successful strategies to reduce employee turnover and increase commitment to the organization. Ndungu (2017) confirmed that employee reward systems are attractive to new employees while eliciting high work performance and maintaining work commitment. Figure 6 shows the frequency of terms expressed by the participants regarding reward and recognition as a successful retention strategy. Participant 1 acknowledged that salespeople choose a career in sales because of the potential to earn a high income. "For any good salesperson, income is a very big part of why they choose to work where they work." Participant 1 added that sales representatives are overachievers and the aspect of earning additional income is attractive. "So we make sure that we offer incentives that are, you know real-time extra things that they can do to improve the paycheck, and you know to get the recognition for what they do."

Figure 6

Key terms Associated with Rewards and Recognition



Mabaso and Diamini (2018) research supported the notion that a well-designed reward system increases employees' level of satisfaction and commitment. Inadequate compensation schemes encourage highly skilled individuals to quit in search of better chances. Employees that are left behind may underperform due to low motivation caused by insufficient reward systems.

Reward systems are described as a scheme that incentivizes employees or groups and recognizes the contributions of individuals (Mendis, 2017). The compensation of sales representatives determines the salesperson’s quality and creates motivation to achieve organizational financial goals. All of the participants noted that sales representatives are compensated based on a structured commission-based package. Company websites confirmed the pay structure of sales representatives that may include a base salary. Fatima (2017) posited that compensation provides a sense of security to salespeople while commissions motivate employees to generate sales. Monetary rewards are the primary motivators of sales efforts, while other incentives such as bonuses and contests increase efforts to perform beyond the job's basic requirements.

Participant 1 agreed that sales representatives that are responsible for a significant percentage of sales deserve praise and rewards. “It’s a balancing act because you want everyone to be proud of them.” Participant 4 believed that it is important that managers recognize how an employee wants to be recognized.

> The whole idea of recognition when people do great things, making sure the recognition is right, some people are just embarrassed. You don’t recognize them in front of, in front of other people, they just want you to recognize it. Yeah, they did a good job but they don’t want you to tell the whole world. Other people want you to tell the whole world, they want you to stand up on a on a stack of boxes and say, hey look how wonderful this person is.

Participant 5 noted that incentivizing sales representatives helps to reduce voluntary turnover, and it is not necessarily financial rewards that are the primary driver. “There’s lots of salespeople, believe it or not, especially in these times, who value days off more than pay. In some situations, a free trip to the beach or massage certificate or trip around the Gulf, some of those things salespeople value more than actual pay." A company's internal document provided evidence of travel incentives for sales representatives' goal achievements. Fatima's (2017) research extended the belief that salespeople value travel incentives as a sense of achievement and reward for efforts.

Participant 1 agreed with Participant 5 and Participant 4 that recognizing the achievement of sales representatives beyond financial rewards is an effective retention strategy. "Sales are the front line for any successful company; therefore, when goals are met, it must be a big deal when sales are greater than expected. It must be a big deal with rewards, it can be cash incentives or time or public recognition, even if only within the company has proven to be very effective." Participant 5 stated that it was not unusual for sales representatives to receive a phone call or email from the president of the company to acknowledge successes or a job well done. Mendis (2017) conferred that employee retention is linked to recognition programs and reward systems that increase employee satisfaction and commitment.

Participant 6 indicated that successes are noted during sales meetings and with an email that acknowledges the sales representative's accomplishments that are also placed in the employee's file. "The recognition and praise are done in staff meetings that is communicated to the employee, as well as their peers. The meeting also is a benchmark where things like that, that is communicated. In meetings, verbally again it is followed up with an email that goes into their folder." Participant 2 acknowledged that they offered incentives “that are, you know, real-time extra things that they can do to improve the paycheck and you know, get the recognition for what they do.” Participant 2 added, “we have a monthly salesperson of the month award. We have a salesperson of the year program, and then we have what’s called our Presidents club. It’s a pretty big honor to win that and usually includes a trip and some different things to go with it.” Participant 3 underscored the importance of recognition awards. Salespeople are recognized at an annual company meeting. The analysis of the participants’ data aligned with Mendis’s (2017) research that employees satisfied with their compensation is less likely to look for opportunities elsewhere. The research revealed that turnover intention directly impacts the level of satisfaction, where turnover intentions could be reduced by increasing the potential of additional rewards and incentives. Organizational leaders should have a combination of monetary and non-monetary incentives to enhance employee retention and commitment.

Recent studies revealed that recognition and awards play an important role in employee satisfaction, which leads to improved customer satisfaction and employee loyalty (Joyce & Ahmad, 2020; Kryscynski, 2021; Owolabi & Adeosun, 2021). The studies confirmed that rewards and recognition are important factors in employees’ decisions to stay with the business. Employers offer cash and non-cash remuneration in exchange for services rendered (Owolabi & Adeosun, 2021). Compensation management is a channel in which employees are compensated for their contributions to their organizations’ success, and it is used to inspire, excite, and attract staff (Joyce & Ahmad, 2020). It is a benefit for both employers and workers that are designed explicitly to meet the organization’s goals and objectives (Kryscynski, 2021). Employee recognition and rewards programs send a powerful message to employees about their value, and they play an important role in employee satisfaction and retention.

Theme 4 coincides with the fundamental tenets of LMX, the conceptual framework of this study. LMX enhances employee work engagement and job performance when there are frequent interactions between leader and followers. The interactions lead to better job design, organizational culture, and resource distribution. Research has revealed an association between LMX quality and job satisfaction and conflict, sales representative’s willingness to accept future job changes, and subordinates’ loyalty and reliability (Paparoidamis & Guenzi, 2009). Sales managers are responsible for shaping the representative’s behavior and organizational outcomes, including turnover intentions. In LMX, leaders convey role expectations to employees and provide intangible and/or tangible benefits to the member who carries out these expectations (Covella et al., 2017). Employees voluntarily accept expectations and have the opportunity to accept, reject or negotiate the expectations. The participants provided data that aligned with the tenets of LMX and the literature. Researchers explored retention strategies through the lens of LMX that included retention and rewards (Gallus & Frey, 2016). The participants agreed that recognition and rewards were a successful strategy that increased the retention of sales representatives.

Applications to Professional Practice

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore successful retention strategies that sales managers use to reduce the voluntary turnover of sales representatives. The applications to professional practice could provide some sales managers strategies that motivate sales employees to remain with the company for an extended period. The participants agreed that the retention of highly skilled sales representatives is a critical initiative of sales managers. The six media sales managers in Alabama interviewed for this study identified successful strategies to mitigate voluntary turnover. The four major themes revealed from the data collection included person-organization fit, supportive work environment, effective communication, and recognition and reward. Retention strategies that increase sales representative job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and inclination to stay produces significant benefits to the organization (Berisha & Lajçi, 2020). By implementing successful strategies to retain high-performing sales representatives, sales managers can achieve organizational financial objectives and a competitive advantage in a highly competitive industry.

The findings of this study could help sales managers recognize the importance and benefits of person-organization fit. Person-organization fit influences work attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes. When employees' values match the work environment, their satisfaction, commitment, and retention levels increase. Organizational leaders can attract long-term employees using an assessment model that identifies different attributes that align with the company's culture.

The results of this study confirm the literature and analysis of the interview data on employee retention that a supportive work environment influences positive outcomes. Managers could benefit from the findings by ensuring a positive work environment where employees are encouraged to engage in interactions with management and peers. In a supportive work environment, employees receive support from their immediate peers and leadership that stimulates employee outcomes such as organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Therefore, managers should cultivate an environment where sales representatives feel safe to share ideas and concerns.

Understanding how effective communication between organizational leaders and employees could benefit managers in the retention of representatives. Encouraging open dialogue in the workplace fosters the attraction and retention of sales representatives. Open dialogue includes management expressing expectations, setting goals, listening to questions, and providing constructive feedback. Effective communication engages employees where they feel valued and motivated, which increases desired business outcomes.

The findings of this study could assist management in recognizing how rewards and recognition for individual accomplishments and contributions imbue feelings of value and appreciation. Echchakoui (2019) underscored that salespeople need and are motivated by formal recognition. Recognition for strong performance matters to the sales function and is a non-monetary reward that is simple to implement.

The costs associated with the loss of high-performance sales representatives adversely affect the profitability of the organization. The application of findings in this study could guide management in developing and improving employee retention strategies. There is no single strategy or retention plan that may satisfy all sales representatives who have different expectations and demands. Thus, it is important that sales managers identify crucial retention strategies that influence employee’s decisions to leave or remain with the organization. Each of the strategies discussed in this study may help sales managers develop successful retention strategies to reduce the voluntary turnover of sales representatives.

Implications for Social Change

Media companies such as broadcast television, radio, cable, and social media platforms can bring about social change by transmitting valuable information to the general public and local communities. As instruments of social change, media outlets connect and educate the communities they serve (Miladi, 2016). The media plays a significant role in informing and influencing public outlook on cultural, political, health, economic and social situations. The information shared by media outlets could incite behavior change leading to more educated, healthier, and financially stable communities. As people become more informed about issues that affect their daily lives, they could use the knowledge to improve their mental and physical health and develop the means to improve the local community's financial well-being, businesses, families, and individuals.

Like other business entities, media companies depend on sales to generate revenue. Revenue generated through sales enables media companies to carry content that educates local communities on health, education, and finance issues. The establishment of successful retention strategies that reduce the turnover of sales representatives could lead to a sustainable workforce and organizational profitability. As a result of focusing on the retention of the salesforce, managers can improve the livelihood of sales representatives and their families, increase the longevity of local businesses serviced by representatives, and create job opportunities for individuals within the communities. Consequently, job creation and local business sustainability could result in favorable economic conditions for businesses and families within the local communities.

Recommendations for Action

Sales managers can use the identified strategies in this study to reduce the turnover of sales representatives. The findings could also help human resource departments develop and implement strategies that support the organization's recruitment, hiring, and retention objectives. Based on the findings of this study and the literature review, the recommendations for action are for sales leaders to consider implementing strategies aimed at retaining sales representatives for an extended period. Following the themes of (a) person-organization fit, (b) supportive work environment, (c) effective communication, and (d) recognition and awards, I offer the following recommendations.

Company leaders should implement an assessment protocol to identify individuals who fit the job and organization. Although three of six participants interviewed used assessments to assist in determining appropriate hires, the remaining participants should investigate the advantages and disadvantages of implementing an appropriate tool. Pre-hire evaluation tools look for traits other than experience and education, such as aptitude, fit, or potential, using scientific metrics that give a recruiting choice more rigor and validity. Researchers suggest that talent assessments could increase the organization’s productivity, cost-saving measures, and retention of top talent.

A supportive work environment is essential to a productive organization where employees feel comfortable expressing their ideas, concerns, and opinions. Managers create supportive work environments by being accessible and available for sales representatives, demonstrating that they care and appreciate the employee's contributions toward organizational goals. Sales managers should continue or implement weekly one-on-one meetings that provide opportunities for sales representatives to discuss concerns and challenges. Beyond weekly meetings, managers should seek additional opportunities to engage with employees that demonstrate concern and attention to issues that matter to the employee. As employees experience that sales managers care for their well-being and success, they demonstrate the same care toward coworkers and are more apt to remain with the company.

Effective communication between sales managers and sales representatives is essential to building high-quality relationships. Communication involves information sharing and ensures a common understanding between two or more parties. Nwabueze and Mileski (2018) suggested that communicating with employees can be challenging in difficult situations. Managers may overlook interpersonal exchanges when focused on the work at hand, risking alienating employees or being accused of micromanaging. Managers should balance tone and word choices to build successful relationships. Therefore, it is recommended that continuous training and assessment of management's communication styles be considered and evaluated.

Recognizing and rewarding employees for accomplishments expresses organizational leaders' appreciation for the individual's hard work and contributions. Viswanathan et al. (2018) confirmed the interview data of one participant that salespeople from households with higher discretionary income prefer non-monetary rewards over equivalent cash, while salespeople who perceive cash as fashionable also preferred other incentives instead of cash. It is recommended that managers consider tangible recognition awards that build pride and deepen engagement, thus, increasing the likelihood of salespeople remaining with the company.

The recommendations could also benefit human resource managers, who are often included in developing company policies and procedures. Human resource managers collect data from exit interviews, stay interviews, focus groups, and surveys. The data gathered could assist with determining where problems exist. The information could be shared with sales managers where strategies are linked to address the issues.

The results of this study could be disseminated in journals where there is limited literature on the sales manager perspective and, specifically, regarding the media industry. The results could also be shared at industry conferences where leaders are in attendance, such as the National Association of Broadcasters and Alabama Broadcasters Association annual meetings. The findings of the study could be presented during training seminars and webinars.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that media sales managers use to reduce the voluntary turnover of sales representatives. One limitation of the study was the sample size of the study, which may not reflect the views of all media sales managers. Six sales managers were interviewed and discussed successful strategies that reduced the voluntary turnover of sales representatives. It is recommended that future researchers expand the sample size comprising of media sales managers from different markets, which may yield additional retention strategies. The geographical location was another limitation due to transferability. The results cannot be transferable to other media sales departments across geographical areas. I recommend that researchers conduct further studies on successful retention strategies from several geographical locations. There are 210 designated market areas and 302 radio metros in the United States. according to the 2020-2021 Nielsen rankings (Media Tracks Communication, 2021). A combination of large and small markets could provide different results. A third limitation of the study was the inclusion of only sales managers. I recommend that researchers conduct studies that include both sales managers and sales representatives. A comparison of the managers' and representatives' perspectives may reveal different strategies or highlight different perspectives that could help organization leaders develop strategies that appeal to both parties.

Reflections

The pursuit of a doctorate has always been a personal goal. At the start of this journey, I did not fully comprehend the dedication, focus, time management, and sacrifice required to complete the doctoral journey. It has been one of the most rewarding undertakings that I have pursued. I have grown throughout the journey to becoming a better writer and researcher. Having spent over 30 years in the media industry as a sales representative, sales manager, and leader, I grew to understand the importance of developing concrete strategies that attract and retain employees. I believe my experience as a sales manager aided in quickly establishing rapport with the study's participants. That same experience possibly discouraged a potential participant from taking part in the study as they were one of my hires. I was concerned that unconscious bias may have impeded the results of this study. I used an interview protocol to ensure that my personal bias did not obstruct the results of the study. I also developed a greater appreciation of the relationship between sales managers and representatives.

My experience in the media industry paralleled this study's focus as well as complemented the skills developed during my tenure in the industry. I was able to leverage my skills and knowledge as a former sales executive to understand the complexities of the sales process, communicate, and understand the industry's language. The pursuit of a doctorate is relevant to my current career in higher education, not only for advancement opportunities but a beacon to students of what can be achieved. The doctoral journey has positioned me to give back to my community, to those who aspire to pursue an advanced degree, and as a consultant to the industry who aim to retain employees.

I entered this journey with the hopes of producing a quality research study that could benefit those in the media industry. However, the doctoral journey shifted my purpose to benefit those I encounter in the classroom, business leaders, entrepreneurs, and my local community. The shift in focus was the result of Walden University's intentional pursuit and commitment to social change. Denzel Washington conveyed my reason for completing this journey. "At the end of the day, it's not about what you have or even what you've accomplished. It's about what you've done with those accomplishments. It's about who you've lifted up and who you've made better. It's about what you've given back."

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore successful strategies that media sales managers use to reduce the voluntary turnover of sales representatives. Organization leaders perceive sales force retention as a critical objective (Wang & Chen, 2017). The loss of a single salesperson could range between $50,000 - $75,000, clearly illustrating that turnover of sales representatives could affect the organization's profitability, revenue, and overall business performance. It is imperative that sales managers develop retention strategies that incentivize sales representatives to remain with the organization. Beyond a competitive pay plan, there are other strategies that managers can implement to mitigate the voluntary turnover of the salesforce.

I conducted semi-structured interviews using Zoom, an online platform, to interview media sales managers in Alabama who had at least three years of management experience with implementing and developing successful retention strategies. Success strategies were determined by the representative's tenure at the company, which ranged from 5 to 20 years. The study's participants were asked the same open-ended interview questions, in the same order, to gain an in-depth understanding of the strategies media sales managers used to retain representatives. I reviewed documentation to methodologically triangulate the data collected to enhance the study's validity. I employed member checking to confirm my interpretation of the data and QDA Miner Lite software to analyze the data collected. The results of the study suggested that person-organization fit, supportive work environment, effective communication, and rewards and recognition were successful strategies used to reduce the voluntary turnover of sales representatives.

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Appendix A: Background Questionnaire

1. **Work in (circle ONE):**

A. Television

B. Radio

C. Cable

D. Other __________

2. **Worked in (circle ONE):**

A. Television

B. Radio

C. Cable

3. What position do you hold?

____

4. Did you?

A. develop retention strategies

B. implement retention strategies

5. **How long have you held a management position that includes managing sales representatives?**

A. Less than 6 months

B. 6 months to 1 year

C. 1 year – 3 years

D. 3 years or more

6. **How many representatives were employed under your guidance at the start of your tenure?**

7**. Has there been any turnover? Yes ________ No ____________**

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to explore strategies that sales managers use to reduce the voluntary turnover of sales representatives.

Interview preparation.

- I will call participants to schedule a convenient time and date for the interview.
- I will secure a conference room at a local business incubator or public library for privacy.
- I will send an email reminder of the scheduled time and date for the interview, along with the consent form. Participants will be asked to return the signed consent form via email.

Opening the interview.

- I will greet and thank participants for agreeing to participate in the study and for allowing time out of their busy schedule to engage in a conversation about retention strategies.
- I will introduce myself to the participant and reveal my prior experience as a media professional.
- I will explain the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study that explores successful retention strategies sales managers use to reduce the voluntary turnover of sales representatives.
- I will explain the voluntary nature of participating in the study and the flexibility to withdraw from the study at any time.
- I will explain the potential benefit of the study that may provide sales managers with retention strategies to reduce employee turnover.
- I will Inform participants that I will be asking a series of questions and capturing their responses via audio recording devices and handwritten notes.
- I will ensure that the participant has read the consent form and provide the participant with an opportunity for questions. I will give the participant a copy of the signed consent form for their records. If the signed consent form has not been received prior to the interview, the participant will be asked to sign the form before the meeting commences.

Interview.

I will ask participants the same open-ended questions to collect data that explore their perceptions and experiences in implementing and developing successful retention strategies that reduce the voluntary turnover of sales representatives. I will follow up with probing questions to ensure clarification or to gain additional insight. Listed are the questions for the interview process.

1. What strategies have you used that have proven successful in the reduction

of voluntary sales representative turnover?

2. How do you measure representative employee turnover in your organization?
3. How are strategies to reduce voluntary turnover effectively communicated to sales representatives?
4. What role does leadership play in the reduction of voluntary sales representatives' employee turnover in your organization?
5. What is your process for developing trust and respect between you and the sales representatives to increase retention?
6. What more can you add to this study regarding strategies needed to reduce voluntary sales representative employee turnover?

End of interview

- I will thank the participant for their time and the information provided for the research study. The interview will be restricted to 45-60 minutes for responses to 6 interview questions.
- I will inform the participant that the data received will be summarized and emailed for their review and verification of its accuracy.
- I will inform participants that a second interview may be necessary to capture additional information, to answer additional questions, and for participant to review my interpretation of the information provided during the interview. I will schedule a tentative time for the follow-up meeting.

After the interview.

- I will transcribe the audio recording as soon as possible after the interview.
- I will review the transcript and notes to ascertain if changes are necessary for the next interview that improves the quality of the information received, if the information contributed to the overarching research question, and to identify themes.

Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. What strategies have you used that have proven successful in the reduction of voluntary sales representative turnover?
2. How do you measure representative employee turnover in your organization?
3. How are strategies to reduce voluntary turnover effectively communicated to sales representatives?
4. What role does leadership play in the reduction of voluntary sales representatives' employee turnover in your organization?
5. What is your process for developing trust and respect between you and the sales representatives to increase retention?
6. What more can you add to this study regarding strategies needed to reduce voluntary sales representative employee turnover?