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Leaders' Strategies for Accommodating Flexible Work Arrangements to Retain Employees Post-COVID-19

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Abstract

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Abstract

As the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic subside, business leaders are concerned about retaining employees. Business leaders are concerned with employee retention, as replacing an employee can be costly and erode profitability. Grounded in McGregor's theory X and theory Y, the purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies five first-line leaders in one organization in the Southwest United States used to retain employees who wanted to continue flexible work arrangements post-COVID-19. Data were collected using semistructured interviews and a review of the participants' corporate websites about the future of the workplace. The three themes that emerged through Braun and Clarke's 6-phase thematic analysis were acknowledgment and acceptance, communication, and collaboration. A key recommendation is for business leaders to acknowledge and accept that there is a "new workplace." The implications for positive social change include the potential to attract and retain talent, increase the availability of jobs, and improve the environment and economy.

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Dedication

I am dedicating the successful completion of my Doctor of Business Administration degree to those who kept me going through their encouragement. The positive support from my family, coworkers, and friends reassured me that it was possible, and I was able to reach the end of my doctoral journey.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The practice of flexible work arrangements (FWAs) has been available to leaders in organizations for years. However, before COVID-19 was declared a pandemic in March 2020, only approximately 3% of United States employees participated in part-time FWAs; this percentage increased to 43% of full-time employees who worked remotely in the first few months of the pandemic in April 2020 (Feitosa & Salas, 2020). In a 2021 opinion survey, workers reported that they did not want to return to the daily commute and be in an office for up to 8-hours per day (Hirsch, 2021). Research conducted before the pandemic showed that leaders who discouraged FWAs experienced higher employee turnover than leaders who supported FWAs (Bae et al., 2019). Employees' desire to continue FWAs highlights the need for business leaders to develop accommodating work practices post-COVID-19 because of their impact on employee retention. In this study, I explored successful strategies some first-line leaders in the Southwest United States used to retain employees who wanted to continue FWAs post-COVID-19.

Background of the Problem

As the COVID-19 pandemic is becoming manageable, United States business leaders have increasingly mandated that employees return to the physical work location. Some business leaders do not support employees' participation in FWAs (Smith et al., 2019). This finding holds true in research conducted since the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic in March 2020. Requiring employees to return to in-person, face-to-face work at a central location is problematic because it impacts employee retention (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020, p. 15). In one study, up to 90% of

employees stated that they preferred FWAs and wished to continue to work-from-home and work-from-anywhere post-COVID-19 (Green et al., 2020, p. 11). Perceiving traditional work practices as unaccommodating, employees may choose to leave their positions, as studies have shown FWAs is a predictor of employee retention (Sull et al., 2022). Consequently, some business leaders have experienced difficulties retaining employees due to minimizing or eliminating FWAs as the constraints of COVID-19 subside.

Some business leaders face challenges due to their lack of strategies with employees who participate in FWAs. Organizations that offer FWAs but have leaders who discourage its use find higher employee turnover than leaders who support FWAs (Bae et al., 2019). The lack of business leader support of FWAs is evident from Wang et al. (2021), who found that before COVID-19, approximately 3% of United States employees participated in FWAs.

In addition, business leaders should realize FWAs are more extensive than employees participating in telework. The concept of FWAs extends beyond considering where the employee performs the work to the flexibility in the number of hours and days an employee works. To date, the existing literature has mainly focused on employee productivity in virtual work environments. For example, studies have focused on the productivity of employees who participate in telework, such as de Macêdo et al. (2020), who studied the ergonomics of telework and found that telework could have a positive effect on employee productivity. Recent studies have focused on employees' productivity during the COVID-19 pandemic; a study by Carillo et al. (2020) found no conclusive

evidence that teleworking during COVID-19 has had detrimental effects on employee productivity. Other studies have focused on the importance of having an adequate telework environment to ensure employee productivity, such as having the necessary internet technology equipment and tools to accomplish job tasks (Mihalca et al., 2021). Future research needs to focus on the leader and their strategies to lead employees who want to participate in FWAs. By implementing the most appropriate strategies, business leaders may find success in retaining employees who want to participate in FWAs post-COVID-19.

Problem and Purpose

The specific business problem addressed in this research was that some first-line leaders in the Southwest United States lacked strategies for retaining employees who wanted to continue FWAs post-COVID-19. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies used by some first-line leaders in the Southwest United States to retain employees who wanted to continue FWAs post-COVID-19.

Population and Sampling

Data were collected from five purposefully sampled first-line leaders in the Southwest United States. A researcher uses purposeful sampling for qualitative research because this form of sampling ensures understanding of the research problem under study by selecting participants who meet the study criteria (Kalu, 2019). The criteria for the participants were first-line leaders in the Southwest United States who have had successful strategies for leading employees who participate in FWAs. I interviewed

participants using a semistructured interview process designed to elicit their experiences with addressing employees who participated in FWAs.

My sample size was determined by data saturation. Researchers use their experience to determine the number of participants that will lead to data saturation, which occurs when information becomes repetitive, and no new ideas emerge (Braun & Clarke, 2021). My approach was to reach data saturation by interviewing at least five participants. The strategy used to gain access to the participants was my professional networks, which included colleagues, professional organizations, such as the Association for Talent Development, and fellow students in educational programs used to identify participants who met the criteria. I made initial contact via email and requested consent to interview. I also requested the participants share relevant nonproprietary information about their organization's FWAs policies and procedures and reviewed the participants' organization websites for pertinent information about FWAs.

Nature of the Study

I considered the three research methods for this study. The three research methods are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). I selected the qualitative method because it provided a setting to use open-ended questions to explore this underexamined phenomenon. According to Busetto et al. (2020), qualitative researchers use open-ended questions to discover reasons for observed patterns in how individuals view their world; these questions allow interviewees to express their experiences. An open-ended question invites individuals to express what is and is not their experience and to describe their perceptions of a phenomenon (Busetto et al., 2020).

In contrast, the quantitative method tests a hypothesis and obtains statistical measures (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). Mixed methods research includes qualitative and quantitative elements (Timans et al., 2019). To explore leaders who lacked strategies for retaining employees who wanted to continue FWAs post-COVID-19, I did not test hypotheses that are part of a quantitative study or the quantitative portion of a mixed method study.

I considered three research designs for this study. There are three designs that a researcher could use for a qualitative study on leader's strategies for retaining employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19: case study, phenomenology, and ethnography. The case study research design enables the researcher to explore the complexity of a case in the most complete way possible through in-depth data collection. A case study involves multiple types and sources of information and the reporting of descriptive themes (Yin, 2018). A single case study is appropriate when the researcher focuses on the central concern of the issue. The central concern was the issue of FWAs as represented in the case of first-line leader's strategies in the Southwest United States to retain employees who wanted to continue FWAs post-COVID-19. A phenomenological design is a way to gather a group of people's similar experiences (Gunawan et al., 2021). I did not analyze the experiences of a group of leaders; instead, I studied individual leaders' experiences; thus, the phenomenological design was not appropriate for this study. Ethnography is the study of group cultures through observing the participants (Wood & Mattson, 2019). Studying group culture was not the intent of this study; therefore, ethnography was not a suitable choice.

Research Question

What strategies do some first-line leaders in the Southwest United States use to retain employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies have you used to retain employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19?
2. How did you measure the effectiveness of your strategies to retain employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19?
3. What strategies did you find that worked best to retain employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19?
4. What key challenges to implementing the successful strategies did you encounter?
5. How did you address the key challenges to implementing the successful strategies for retaining employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19?
6. What additional information can you share about the strategies you used to retain employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19?

Conceptual Framework

For my study, I used a theory about the nature of people at work. McGregor (1960) developed theory x and theory y, leadership theories about organizations and management that outline two different leaders' views about the nature of people at work. McGregor suggested that theory x is the assumption that the average person dislikes work and will avoid it when given the opportunity; therefore, most people must be threatened or punished to work, and the average person prefers direction to avoid responsibility

(McGregor, 1960). Theory x leaders use an authoritative leadership style that generally produces poor results (McGregor, 1960). The opposing leaders' view, known as theory y, of the nature of people at work suggests that people enjoy work, are responsible, and make significant contributions to the organization (McGregor, 1960). Theory y leaders use a participative leadership style that generally produces positive results because it allows people to grow and develop (McGregor, 1960). McGregor's leadership theory about organizations and management aligned with this study that explored the strategies first-line leaders use in FWAs to retain employees post-COVID-19.

Operational Definitions

Flexible work arrangements (FWAs): Like remote work and telework, the employees can work outside traditional work hours (Vanajan et al., 2020).

Traditional work arrangements: Employees work a fixed schedule at the firm's place of business under the employer's control (Choi, 2020).

Work from anywhere: Employees have the flexibility to choose where they live; they do not have to live within commuting distance of the office (Choudhury et al., 2021).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are facts considered to be true but are not verifiable (Armstrong & Kepler, 2018). There were three assumptions for this study. The first assumption was that the participants would be honest about their leadership experience with FWAs and strategies to increase employee retention. This assumption was addressed by informing

the participants about the purpose of the study. The second assumption was that leaders feel safe and comfortable sharing their strategies concerning FWAs and employee retention. This assumption was addressed by reiterating that what the participants said in the interview would not be attributed to them without first obtaining their written permission. The third assumption was that the participant would schedule sufficient time to answer the interview questions. This assumption was addressed by scheduling the interview when it was convenient for the participant.

Limitations

Limitations refer to potential weaknesses of the study and are out of the researcher's control (Yin, 2018). There were two limitations to this study. The first limitation was that I trusted the participants' responses would be truthful, with no misleading statements or exaggerated responses beyond my control. This limitation was addressed by ensuring the participants knew they had the right to, at any time, not answer a question they did not feel comfortable answering. In addition, the participant had the right to stop the interview anytime they wished to end. The second limitation was that participants might not have understood the questions. This limitation was addressed by providing the participant copy of the questions and their responses to verify accuracy.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the characteristics that limit the study scope, define the study's boundaries, and delimit the researcher's locus of control (Gutiérrez et al., 2016). There were two delimitations for this study. The first delimitation for this study was to focus only on the strategies of successful leaders of employees who wanted to participate in

FWAs post-COVID-19. The criteria for participation that addressed this delimitation was leaders with successful strategies for leading employees who participated in FWAs. The second delimitation was a single case study with a participant sample in one region, first-line leaders in the Southwest United States. This delimitation was addressed by the generalization of the study's findings, not specific findings, to a broad population beyond the particular subjects in the study.

Significance of the Study

The study is significant in that the results may contribute to business practice to assist some business leaders in retaining employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19, thereby increasing the organization's ability to remain competitive in attracting and retaining talent. However, while organizations have policies to implement FWAs, some leaders do not support employees' participation in FWAs (Smith et al., 2019). Implications of the findings may positively change some business leaders' support of FWAs. According to Contreras et al. (2020), implications for business practices could include developing e-leadership styles to increase leaders' acceptance of the use of FWAs.

The results from the study may contribute to a positive social change by improving the environment, economy, and availability of jobs. The 1996 Clean Air Act brought awareness to reducing pollution (Currie & Walker, 2019). The 1996 Clean Air Act created the possibility of a decrease in traffic from traveling to and from work, thereby increasing the possibility of a decrease in air pollution. Moreover, studies like this one could have a more significant social impact by increasing an organization's

ability to attract and retain employees who need FWAs options. According to Travis (2021), this would include employees with disabilities. In this sense, the study may have implications that speak to issues of equity and access to professional employment spaces.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

In this literature review, I provide a thorough summary of the research topic to explore strategies some first-line leaders in the Southwest United States used to retain employees who wanted to continue FWAs post-COVID-19. The review of the professional and academic literature consists of four parts: (a) the literature review opening narrative, (b) discussion of the conceptual framework, (c) discussion of supporting and contrasting theories, and (d) discussion of studies that align with the conceptual framework. McGregor's theory x and theory y were the conceptual framework for this qualitative single case study and provided a potential means for addressing the research question. The research question is as follows: What strategies do some first-line leaders in the Southwest United States use to retain employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19?

The most relevant and recent studies were gathered by finding peer-reviewed scholarly articles through the following academic databases: SAGE Journals, EBSCO, ProQuest, Google Scholar, and Thoreau's multidatabase search. The research of peer-reviewed articles primarily consisted of articles published within the last 5 years. Library database research generated approximately 153 references, with approximately 136 or 89% peer-reviewed and 140 or 92% published on or after 2019. The terms used during the database search included *flexible work, remote work, virtual work, telework, work*

from home, employee retention, pandemic, COVID-19, McGregor theory x and y, Herzberg two factor theory, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Ouchi's theory z, Homan's social exchange theory, and *Simon's organizational equilibrium theory.* In this literature review, I analyze sources exploring human relations in management to lead employees who wanted to continue FWAs post-COVID-19 successfully. The literature review covers issues related to the work environment, leadership approaches, elements of a strong organization, and COVID-19 impact and employee retention.

McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y

The conceptual framework for this study was McGregor's theories x and y. The 1960 book, The Human Side of Enterprise, explored the human relations movement in management. Specifically, it focused on leaders' assumptions on how to manage people. McGregor (1960) proposed two theories that offer insight into how leaders perceive and address employee motivation. The two contrasting ideas highlight the role of core assumptions and values in management systems. Theory x is the belief that the average person dislikes work and will avoid it when given the opportunity; therefore, most people must be threatened or punished to work (McGregor, 1960). Consistent with McGregor's theory x assumption, Daneshfard and Rad (2020) suggested that theory x could support the assumption that the average person prefers leaders who provide direction, which could afford the employee the opportunity to avoid responsibility. Leaders who hold the assumptions of theory x may implement management practices that disguise their beliefs in the assumptions of theory x to portray themselves as an advocate of theory y. McGregor's theory y assumption submitted that people enjoy work, are responsible, and

make significant contributions to the organization. Expanding on this idea, Deterding (2019) suggested that leaders could practice a newer concept in management, known as gamification, that could map into McGregor's theories x and y. The practice of gamification in management provides a structure of incentives that resembles the play-reward structure typical of games (Deterding, 2019). The concept of gamification could be a way for a leader to conceal their true beliefs about employee motivation. Consequently, the leader who practices the management concept of gamification may institute management practices that mask their belief in the assumptions of theory x.

McGregor (1960) identified managerial practices that could disguise the theory x assumption of leaders controlling employee motivation, such as management by objective, performance appraisals, and incentive plans. For example, when performance appraisal uses force rankings, employees may feel pressure to be physically present, especially when they believe it is a way to distinguish themselves from other employees when it comes time for a performance appraisal (Gonsalves, 2020). Likewise, Deterding (2019) asserted that gameplay could be a formal system, such as performance appraisal, that shapes behavior. As a result, the employee could interpret the practice of performance appraisal as the leader's level of support of their participation in FWAs because they may feel pressure to be physically at work to distinguish themselves from other employees. Thus, a leader may say they support FWAs, but the practice of performance appraisals could indicate the organization's culture as being less than supportive of FWAs. The opposing view of the nature of people at work may increase a leader's level of support for employees who want to participate in FWAs.

The opposing view that McGregor offered was theory y, which includes the notion that employees are worthy of trust and respect. Leaders who subscribe to the assumptions of theory y believe that people who enjoy work are not irresponsible and significantly contribute to the organization (McGregor, 1960). McGregor's two differing assumptions of employee motivation could influence a leader's leadership approach.

The two contrasting management systems developed by McGregor highlighted the difference between the management systems established by authority and those established by influence. McGregor (1960) challenged the fundamental view that managers require control because employees need coercion, control, direction, and threats of punishment to give adequate effort toward the success of the organization's goals. In contrast, McGregor suggested that employees have inherent motivation to do their best toward achieving the organization's goals with proper support. A leader's support of FWAs could hinge on their beliefs and the assumptions of employee motivation. For example, with FWAs, the traditional forms of social control, such as direct supervision and physical proximity, rarely exist (Eseryel et al., 2021). Thus, when given the proper tools, some leaders may adjust their views of employee motivation, which could increase their ability to retain employees who wanted to continue FWAs post-COVID-19. In addition, McGregor urged the development of a management theory with less hierarchy where leaders succeed more because of influence rather than authority.

Both authority and influence have a place in leadership; however, there are varying levels of leadership control. McGregor (1960) suggested that when people

respond poorly to a leader's decision, the leader's reaction is to believe the employees are incompetent, uncooperative, or lazy. As a result, a leader may implement a traditional leadership approach in response to the situation, which could contradict supporting participation in FWAs. McGregor further added that the cause of the employee's poor response could be that the leader chose an inappropriate level of control. Consequently, leaders' assumptions often influence their decision in different situations. McGregor further suggested that some leaders frequently make decisions without thought, but the leader believes the action will produce a specific result. Kanwal et al. (2019) studied the results of positive and negative leadership behaviors and discovered results consistent with McGregor's assumption that a leader who believes employees need direction will generally take a traditional approach to leadership. Furthermore, a leader who believes an employee generally strives to do their best will likely take a participative approach to leadership (Kanwal et al., 2019). A leader's approach could influence the organization's culture and the leader and employee relationship, specifically, communication and trust, which could directly impact a leader's willingness to support employee participation in FWAs.

Throughout history, it has been challenging to find an organizational culture with managerial practices other than the traditional approach to leadership. McGregor (1960) asserted that the prevailing traditional organizational culture is that authority and is the central means of leadership control. McGregor had the foresight to suggest that as organizations move beyond the industrial revolution, the organizational culture might need to move towards a participative leadership approach. A move toward a participative

leadership approach might facilitate a leader and employee relationship that could impact communication and trust, thereby creating the possibility of triggering an evolution in organizational cultures that would encourage FWAs.

Supporting and Contrasting Theories

Herzberg's two-factor theory, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Ouchi's theory z, Simon's organizational equilibrium theory, and Homan's social exchange theories share McGregor's views of employee motivation in the workplace. The theories support McGregor's view that leaders should take a participative or influential approach to leadership and that employees deserve trust and respect. In addition, McGregor (1960) suggested that leaders can achieve employees' trust and respect by building leader and employee relationships, leading to work communities that foster communication and trust. However, McGregor's theories x and y may differentiate from Herzberg's, Maslow's, Ouchi's, Simon's, and Homan's theories on employee motivations in the workplace that could influence how to improve relationships and communities.

A leader's ability to move from a theory x assumption to a theory y assumption is to understand the two different views leaders hold of employee motivation. McGregor's (1960) goal was to highlight the two different assumptions leaders hold of employees at work. Touma (2021) argued that McGregor's theory x is predicated on the assumption that authority is central and a requisite means of management control, while the opposite theory y assumes that employees are worthy of trust and respect. McGregor theorized management's view of what motivates employees as coercion, control, direction, and threats of punishment. However, McGregor argued the opposing view that with proper

support, employees' motivation to do their best is intrinsic. McGregor's theories x and y and Herzberg's two-factor theory described comparable motivators that influence employees at work but may contrast in their views of the appropriate managerial practices that influence employees' motivation in the workplace.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

Employee motivation or demotivation could either come from satisfaction or dissatisfaction at work. Herzberg (1965) argued that separate sets of mutually exclusive factors in the workplace cause job satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The two factors are motivation factors and hygiene factors. The motivation factors cover intrinsic needs, such as achievement, recognition, and advancement; they allow employees to be content in their job and promote growth (Herzberg, 1965). At the same time, hygiene factors are not related to the intrinsic motivational structure of the workplace but must be present in the workplace to prevent dissatisfaction. The hygiene factors cover extrinsic needs, such as pay and relationships with peers in the workplace (Herzberg, 1965). Herzberg contended that motivation and hygiene factors could be essential to employee motivation; however, motivation factors are intrinsic and encourage job satisfaction, and hygiene factors are extrinsic and prevent job dissatisfaction. Herzberg suggested that employees could be dissatisfied with their job when hygiene factors are missing, for example, the lack of participation in relationships at work. Thus, a way to prevent dissatisfaction could be recognizing employees' desire to form relationships within their work communities.

Some employees may feel the need or want to build relationships with leaders at work. Therefore, Herzberg's (1965) assertion that leaders could reevaluate the human

aspect of their employees could assist in understanding some employees' aspirations to forge a connection with their leaders. The leaders could invest emotionally in the relationship with employees by talking, thanking the employee for their loyalty, and acknowledging their hard work. Accordingly, establishing leader and employee relationships could impact the employee's satisfaction with their job. When Herzberg established the two-factor theory, he believed the culture was that people were motivated mainly by money and less by relationships. Herzberg's description of intrinsic and extrinsic needs could be similar to McGregor's (1960) participative or influential approach to leadership. Herzberg proposed that the content, not the job context, caused satisfaction, and leaders should understand what motivates employees to be productive. Thus, attending to the human aspect of employees and facilitating leader and employee relationships could minimize employee dissatisfaction.

McGregor's theories x and y compare to Herzberg's two-factor theory, where Herzberg (1965) identified two employees' needs that explain the theory of motivation; the two needs include intrinsic (motivational factors) and extrinsic (hygiene factors). The intrinsic needs are desires, such as achievement, recognition, and advancement, that cause job satisfaction (Herzberg, 1965). Herzberg's motivational factors are similar to McGregor's (1960) theory y in that motivating employees could be as fundamental as providing opportunities and treating people with respect. Herzberg further added that when employees feel the satisfaction of their intrinsic needs, they may experience contentment and want to continue to grow. In contrast, the hygiene factors do not relate to the workplace but must be present to prevent dissatisfaction (Herzberg, 1965). Zhang

et al. (2020) recognized Herzberg's (1965) findings that hygiene factors cover extrinsic needs, such as pay and relationships with peers in the workplace. Byrd (2022) supported McGregor's assertion of theory y and Herzberg's suggestion that hygiene factors could be employee motivators by stating that interaction with colleagues at work gives meaning to the employee's work. Like McGregor, Herzberg found that leaders must invest emotionally by building employee relationships. Herzberg suggested building leader and employee relationships; a leader can talk to the employee, acknowledge their hard work, and thank them for their loyalty. McGregor asserted that leaders should trust employees to facilitate building leader and employee relationships. Likewise, Ryan and Deci (2020) found that motivational tendencies associated with influence and intrinsic needs could require supportive conditions in the workplace, similar to McGregor's theory y influential leaders and Herzberg's two-factor theory, specifically extrinsic factors. In addition to the two-factor theory, theories like Maslow's hierarchy of needs support the concept of building workplace leader and employee relationships that foster communication and trust and could lead to retaining employees.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory

Leaders can use motivational theories to help discover the best strategies to retain employees. Consistent with McGregor's theory y and Herzberg's hygiene factors, Maslow (1943) attempted to formulate a positive theory of motivation. In contrast, Maslow believed there was an absence of a valid theory of motivation. Maslow's theory of human motivation entailed five basic needs: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-

actualization. Maslow further stated that the needs are satisfied hierarchically, starting with physiological needs.

The physiological need is the starting point for Maslow's theory. A physiological need is when the body lacks some food, and the individual will develop a specific hunger for that food (Maslow, 1943). Maslow (1943) found that no other interests exist for the starving person but food. The person tends to think that if only they are guaranteed food for the rest of their life, they will be happy and will never want anything more (Maslow, 1943). However, Maslow found this is false, and other needs emerge once the physiological need is satisfied.

Once a person has satisfied their physiological need, people feel the need for safety, specifical safety in their communities, including their work communities. Maslow (1943) described the safety need in employment as a job with tenure and protection that would afford a person the ability to have a savings account and insurance of various kinds, such as medical, dental, and disability. In comparison, an employee might feel safe at work by what Zeb et al. (2020) suggested as a positive relationship between a leader and employee, which could satisfy the safety need to be categorized by Maslow. Maslow observed that when there is satisfaction between physiological and safety needs, the love needs surface, and the whole cycle repeats itself with the next need in the hierarchy.

The love need follows the safety need in the hierarchy of needs. Maslow (1943) described the love need as a desire for affectionate relations with people. For example, to belong to a group, a person will strive intensely to achieve this goal. However, people need to fulfill the esteem need once the love need is satisfied. Maslow described the

esteem need as the desire for strength, achievement, adequacy, confidence, independence, and freedom. The satisfaction of self-esteem leads to feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability, and adequacy to be helpful and necessary in the world (Maslow, 1943). Finally, self-actualization emerges after the satisfaction of the first four basic needs.

The final desire an individual strives to achieve is self-actualization. Maslow (1943) described self-actualization as the aspiration for self-fulfillment, namely, the tendency for a person to become everything that they can become. Maslow found that satisfied people are the exception and stated that further research is needed to understand why it is uncommon for people to satisfy their basic needs. Several theorists study similar phenomena and sometimes can build on previous research, such as a human's desire to belong and form relationships.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is one of the several theories that support leaders and employee relationships in the workplace. According to Maslow (1943), human motivation entails satisfying five basic needs. One of the basic needs is forming relationships with people, belonging, and finding a place within a group. Lussier (2019) suggested that Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory might be unique because two basic needs require fulfillment before the employee realizes the need for belonging. In contrast, McGregor's (1960) theories x and y are the view of leaders on motivating employees, not necessarily how to satisfy employees' needs to move to participative or influential leadership approaches to facilitate relationship building. McGregor's and Maslow's theories included the possible value of developing leader and employee relationships.

Moore et al. (2020) supported Maslow's assertion that relationship-based leadership could be an inclusive style and McGregor's findings that influential leadership should replace autocratic leadership. Likewise, Badawy et al. (2019) reported results consistent with McGregor and Herzberg that given the influence leaders have over employees, the leader and employee relationships could be the most meaningful relations in the workplace. The concept of building relationships and the feeling of belonging continues throughout the literature.

Ouchi's Theory Z

Ouchi (1981) studied Japanese and American management practices and developed theory z, a theory of human motivation that builds on McGregor's (1960) theories x and y. Consistent with McGregor's theory y, Ouchi's theory z is based on the assumption that employees want to enter partnerships with their employer and colleagues. Ouchi also assumed that employees have a strong desire for connection, which requires a high level of support from the leaders and the organization in the form of a safe working environment. Both McGregor (1960) and Ouchi argued that an employee would make more effort if they had appropriate support from their leaders. Thus, a leader's support of employees could enhance employee retention.

Employees are more likely to remain with an organization when they connect with leaders and other employees. Ouchi (1981) stated that when there are high turnover rates or several employees who do not understand each other, there is the possibility that the organization consists of employees who have not made connections and essentially feel like strangers. According to Ouchi, leaders who adopt theory z rarely rely on the

traditional leadership approach of monitoring employees. Ouchi further added that family, culture, and traditions are as critical as working conditions. Thus, it could be important for employees to form connections with others in the workplace to foster the organization's culture, so there might be a need for the people within organizations with leaders who adopt the theory z assumption to rely upon all employees' internalization of the organization's culture (Ouchi, 1981). Thereby, there could be value in leaders understanding their assumptions of employee motivation that could influence the organizational culture along with the employee's experiences could impact the organization's level of bureaucracy that could influence the organizational culture.

An organization's bureaucracy and hierarchies could have a place in research about employee retention. Ouchi (1981) stated that in a bureaucracy, an underlying acceptance could legitimize the hierarchy. Ouchi further added that a bureaucracy succeeds only if lower-level employees regard their superiors as fair and evenhanded in evaluating their work and providing appropriate rewards. Therefore, a type z organization could be capable of a level of complexity and of a form of harmony that typical bureaucracies cannot achieve. The practice of theory z could cultivate the ability to foster the trust that allows for building leader and employee relationships and communities within the workplace.

The concept of belonging in Ouchi's (1981) theory z is similar to McGregor's (1960) assertion in theory y that leaders should move toward a participative or influential leadership approach that could facilitate leader and employee relationships. Ouchi's theory z expands McGregor's theories x and y and is a theory about human motivation.

McGregor found that employees desire connections with others in the workplace. Likewise, Ouchi found that employees frequently want to partner with their employers and colleagues. Ouchi suggested that employees may not remain with an organization absent relationships. Bailey et al.'s (2019) findings aligned with McGregor, Maslow's (1943), Herzberg's (1965), and Ouchi's theories; in this way, leaders could be responsible for fostering a sense of purpose, community, and belonging in the workplace. Like McGregor, Ouchi found it is unlikely that a bureaucratic organization will achieve the same level of community as those with less hierarchy. In addition, when building leader and employee relationships, there should be consideration given to the contribution of the leader and employee.

Simon's Organizational Equilibrium Theory

People generally make decisions depending on the benefit or the value of exchange for the decision. Simon (1945) studied the process of decision-making in organizations. Simon's theory is built on Barnard's (1938) observation that motivating employees to continue contributing is one of the essential activities of leaders. Simon's theory of organizational equilibrium refers to the organization's ability to attract sufficient contributions to ensure its survival.

A leader and employee within an organization could form a relationship where each contributes to that relationship. Simon (1945) suggested that an ideal organization would rest in equilibrium. Moreover, an organization could fulfill the individual needs of members and stakeholders and its objective without any need for direct control (Simon, 1945). Furthermore, the organization's culture might indirectly shape decisions made by

its members and could directly influence the employees' decisions following the organization's and employees' values and loyalties (Simon, 1945). The employee's values and beliefs could drive behaviors, while the organization's values systems could justify the behavior of the employees (Langer et al., 2019). Simon found an area of acceptance where the employee will behave in the organization's interest. Thus, leaders who act responsibly might create an environment where employees can focus on organizational goals.

A researcher could argue that an organization's leaders could be responsible for creating an environment where employees will reasonably make decisions that focus on organizational goals. Simon (1945) provided the example to illustrate the concept further; a leader is simply a bus driver whose passengers will leave them unless the leader takes them in the employee's desired direction, and the employee usually leaves the leader only minor discretion as to the route to follow. Simon believed there could be a need for a theory that resides in the fact that there are practical limits to human reasonableness because an employee may leave the organization when the leader is not going in a similar direction as the employee. Simon's theory emphasized that employees might continue to contribute if they perceive the incentive outweighs the contribution. Thus, the leader and employee relationship is an exchange process where both should contribute equally.

In building leader and employee relationships, leaders might benefit from considering the amount of the employee's contribution compared to what leaders add to the relationship. The organizational equilibrium theory is the leader's ability to influence employees to contribute to the organization's survival (Simon, 1945). Similar to

McGregor's (1960) theory y assertion that leaders should move towards influencing employees at work rather than forcing employees to work, Simon (1945) suggested that influencing employees could be a way to increase employee contributions to the organizations. In contrast, Simon contended there should be an equal contribution from the leader and employee towards the leader and employee relationship. Chen and Sriphon (2021) supported Simon's contention by stating that when one person contributes to a relationship, there is an expectation of a return contribution to said relationship. Chen and Sriphon further added that the investment in the relationship is also dependent on trust. Thus, the leader and employee relationship could be a relationship that is a function of the leader's influence that produces contributions to the relationship and potentially builds trust between the parties to the relationship. However, the difference in Simon's theory is that he emphasized that there should be equal contributions from the leader and the employee for value to exist within the leader and employee relationship, suggesting that one of the essential activities of a leader is to influence employees to continue contributing to the relationship. Thus, a leader could influence employees by contributing to the leader and employee relationship that could lead to communication and trust.

Homans Social Exchange Theory

Several theories, like McGregor's (1960) theories x and y, support the notion that people seek a sense of belonging. Homans's (1958) social exchange theory is a study of small groups that supports the idea that employees pursue belonging to communities in the workplace. Initially, Homans believed that any society, community, or group is a social system. Homans identified two main fundamental properties of the social exchange

theory, one property is self-interest, and the other property is interdependence. Homans's stated that individuals look out for their economic and psychological best interests whenever there is an exchange between two parties. For example, if the related costs are higher than the rewards, such as if much effort was put into a relationship and not returned, then the relationship may not continue to exist (Homans, 1958). Homans stated that people who give a lot to others try to get a lot in return, and people who get a lot from others are under pressure to give a lot. Homans went on to say that not only does the person seek the most for themselves, but they also try to ensure that no one in their group receives more than themselves. Thus, Homans' social exchange theory could assist leaders in developing strategies to succeed in FWAs by building relationships that could lead to work communities that might foster communication and trust given the right conditions.

Employees generally seek to belong to communities that bring about relationships in the workplace. Notably, building those relationships could take an exchange between the parties. Homans (1958) is consistent with Simon's (1945) organizational equilibrium theory in that there is likely to be an exchange between parties in a relationship, thereby initiating the process of building a relationship. Likewise, McGregor (1960) and Homans agree that building leader and employee relationships is valuable. In contrast with McGregor's assertions that employees need to belong, Homans suggested that the people in a relationship have their self-interests and are interdependent. Porter and Rigby (2021) reported results about a relationship in the workplace consistent with Homans's theory about people in a relationship having self-interest by stating that when the relationship

cost is higher than the return, the parties will probably terminate the relationship. Comparably, Hossain (2019) argued that the exchange between parties in a relationship usually leads to equilibrium. Consistent with Homans exchange theory, Bryant and Merritt (2021) implied that the quality of the exchange between parties in a relationship could be a factor in the leader and employee relationship. Thus, when leaders establish equal relationships with employees, the employees will likely remain with the organization. Building leader and employee relationships could lead to trust, but communication might require different leadership strategies in a traditional work environment than in an FWA environment. A leader's ability to adjust to the different possible strategies could differentiate the level of a leader's support of FWAs, thus, impacting the retention of employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19.

Work Environments

One of the constants in this world is that nothing remains constant, including how, when, and where leaders expect employees to conduct their work. Employees could participate in a traditional work environment where they generally work specific hours at a central location (Choi, 2020). Alternatively, employees could participate in a work environment that allows for remote work. For example, when employee works remotely, they could work from home or other locations (Vanajan et al., 2020). Alternative work arrangements like FWAs could include other than the nine to five regular work hours (Vanajan et al., 2020). Some driving factors that could impact change in how, when, and where employees work may be due to events like pandemics, natural disasters, and conflicts or wars. Before COVID-19, approximately 3% of employees participated in

FWAs (Feitosa & Salas, 2020). In April 2020, following the first few months of the pandemic, Feitosa and Salas (2020) reported that the percentage of employees participating in FWAs increased to approximately 43%. When change is inevitable due to events like COVID-19, the Russian and Ukraine war, and natural disasters including hurricane Michael, floods, and fires, people may find themselves working from home, staggered work shifts, job sharing, or the employers could request the employee to take time off. Consequently, the status quo may not seamlessly translate to the new work environment, specifically from successful leader's strategies in traditional work environments to successful leader's strategies in FWAs, which could require change on the part of the leader.

Traditional Work Environments

The traditional and flexible work environments have distinct boundary differences that could directly impact a leader's strategies to foster team bonding. In a traditional work environment, the employees and leaders physically co-exist at a central location (Mangla, 2021). Co-existing at a central location allows for face-to-face interaction among the group members (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020). One of the benefits of a traditional work environment is that face-to-face interactions could be advantageous to help teams form a bond (Newman & Ford, 2021). In a traditional work environment, employees usually adhere to a 5-day, 8-hour workday with set work hours, such as a nine to five workday regiment (Orland & Rostam-Afschar, 2021). Because leaders have physical access to employees who adhere to a set schedule in a traditional work setting, the leader may feel they possess successful strategies to foster team bonding. The ability

of leaders to facilitate team bonding could be because leaders may have greater access to information in the traditional office setting (Contreras et al., 2020). Thus, a leader's access to employees in a traditional work environment could imply that the traditional work environment is the optimal setting for a successful leader's strategies to foster team bonding in the workplace.

Those leaders who aspire to McGregor's (1960) theory x assumptions may believe that successful leader's strategies are more suitable for a traditional work environment because those same leaders may hold what Daneshfard and Rad (2020) described as the belief that the average person dislikes work and will avoid it when given the opportunity. Reyes et al. (2021) supported McGregor's assumption of theory x leaders by stating that some employees could get off track with their work commitments when direct supervision is distant. Therefore, a reason for the lack of leader support for FWAs could be that some leaders hold McGregor's theory x assumption of employee motivation in the workplace. Consequently, an indicator of some leaders' support of employees' participation in FWAs could be the habitually low percentage of employees participating in FWAs prior to COVID-19. Hunter (2019) identified that several employers might limit the number of employees allowed to work remotely. In a flexible work environment, some or none of the traditional attributes may or may not exist. Thus, some leaders might benefit from developing different strategies to succeed in FWAs.

Flexible Work Environments

Some leaders' strategies could be inadequate in FWAs because the attributes of a traditional work environment differ from that of a flexible work environment. For

example, FWAs consist of working away from the central work locations, such as remote work (Papagiannidis et al., 2020). Initially, remote work meant working from home; however, Choudhury et al. (2021) pointed out the possible evolution of the practice of remote work that could include working from anywhere. Choudhury et al. added that working from anywhere eliminates the customary connection between home and work locations, possibly increasing leaders' challenges with employees who participate in flexible work environments. Additionally, FWA policies could include flexible work hours outside the traditional 8-hour nine-to-five workday (Gonsalves, 2020). One of the standard options of FWAs is for employers to afford the employee the latitude to take time off during regular work hours (Ray & Pana-Cryan, 2021). Other forms of FWAs include allowing employees to gradually return to work after childbirth or adoption, taking a career break for personal or family responsibilities, and taking time off during the day to attend to personal or family needs without losing pay (Ray & Pana-Cryan, 2021). Thus, a leader's success could depend on their ability to transition to leadership strategies conducive to FWAs and perhaps their assumptions of employee motivation.

For leaders to be successful, they could explore moving away from the traditional approach to leadership to one that is a practical approach or leadership strategies that might be more suitable for FWAs. Kanwal et al. (2019) suggested that a leader who believes an employee generally strives to do their best will likely take a participative approach to leadership. In comparison, McGregor's (1960) theory y assumes that employees have inherent motivation to do their best toward achieving the organization's goals. The approach the leaders adopt could influence the organization's culture and the

leader and employee relationship, specifically, communication and trust, which could directly impact a leader's willingness to support employee participation in FWAs. One of the challenges leaders could face when adapting to the different strategies that work in a traditional versus a flexible work environment is the capability to build and maintain a strong organization that could be contingent on the organizational culture, communication, and trust.

Leadership Approaches

Leaders cultivate organizational culture through managerial practices. McGregor (1960) noted that historically the predominant organizational culture is that authority is the central means of leadership control. Kanwal et al. (2019) further added that a leader who believes employees need direction would generally take the traditional authoritative approach to leadership. Consequently, the authoritative leadership styles could indicate the theory x assumption of methods to motivate employees in the workplace. Kanwal et al. suggested that leaders will likely practice a participative approach to leadership when they believe that an employee generally strives to do their best. Subsequently, the participative leadership approach could indicate McGregor's theory y assumption of methods to motivate employees in the workplace. Thus, the managerial practice of leadership approaches could help shape the organization's culture, advancing the leader and employee relationship that could cultivate communication and trust.

Authoritative Leadership Approach

Practices that distinguish authoritative leaders from other leaders could be their inclination to impose their will on employees to gain obedience, cooperation, and respect.

Ahmed Iqbal et al. (2021) submitted that authoritative leaders are strict disciplinarians who enforce rigid rules and procedures to motivate employees. For example, Zabolotniaia et al. (2019) suggested that the benevolent authoritative leadership style could compare to a parent's disciplinary techniques for raising a child. McGregor (1960) was not entirely averse to the authoritative commonly known as the traditional approach as a leadership tool. However, McGregor suggested that different levels of authority might have their place within leadership, such as military and industrial leaders could benefit from authoritative leadership. Karakitapoğlu-Aygün et al. (2020) supported McGregor's assertion by stating that the traditional approach to leadership could be beneficial in jobs that center around completing a task. When a leader utilizes the benevolent authoritative approach described by Zabolotniaia et al. as similar to that of a parent, employees could find they can trust the leader, thereby potentially opening up an opportunity for developing the leader and employee relationship. Authoritative leaders may not feel they have the leadership tools to be successful in the FWA environment because they do not constantly have their eyes on the employee. Eseryel et al. (2021) described a flexible work environment where direct supervision and physical proximity rarely exist. McGregor recognized that organizational culture might need to move towards a participative or influential leadership approach as organizations move beyond the rigidly defined workspaces typical of the industrial revolution. Thus, moving towards a participative leadership approach could facilitate an organizational culture conducive to strengthening the leader's support of FWAs.

Participative Leadership Approach

Practices that distinguish participative leaders from other leaders could be that they exhibit supportive behavior that encourages communication that frequently solicits employee input. Moswela and Kgosidialwa (2019) suggested that supportive leaders are approachable. Thus, employees could view a supportive leader as friendly (Moswela & Kgosidialwa, 2019). Supportive leaders could lean towards accepting McGregor's (1960) theory y assumptions of employees because supportive leaders tend to trust and respect employees. In comparison, participative leaders may be more acceptant of employees' input, ideas, and opinions (Kremer et al., 2019). Accordingly, the practices of a participative leader could be conducive to McGregor's theory y assumptions that employees deserve trust and respect that more readily encourage leader and employee relationships in the workplace.

Several leadership theories describe a leader and employee interaction in the workplace that could assist in building the leader and employee relationship. For example, one of those theories is the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory. LMX is a relationship-based approach to leadership that focuses on the connection and interaction of leaders and employees (Gottfredson et al., 2020). The connections and interactions could aid in forming unique relationships between leaders and employees (Lee et al., 2019). Gottfredson et al. (2020) suggested that the level of the connection between the leaders and employees will determine whether the employee is part of the in or out-group. In-group members experience mutual trust and respect, influence each other, and benefit from a high-quality relationship (Aggarwal et al., 2020). In comparison, members

of the out-group experience a purely work-oriented relationship that entails formal communications generally about job tasks (Aggarwal et al., 2020). Thus, equipping leaders with tools that could assist them in building leaders and employee relationships could generate the support of employees who want to participate in FWAs.

Elements of a Strong Organization

The significant element that could be a factor in establishing the strength of an organization, whether in a traditional or flexible work environment, could be the organizational culture. At the same time, the strength of the organizational culture could influence the level of communication and trust within an organization. Kurniawan et al. (2021) suggested that culture could be a factor that enhances an organization's strength. Obeng et al. (2021) further added that a leader's ability to promote a culture that enhances communication and trust could impact the organization's ability to retain employees. Meng and Berger (2019) noted that leaders who foster a culture of open communication might contribute to the organization's strength. Kurniawan et al., Obeng et al., and Meng and Berger are examples of existing literature that supports McGregor's (1960) assertion that leaders could influence organizational culture through exercising leadership approaches that could attend to the human factor of employees to foster valuable relationships between leaders and employees.

Culture, Communication, and Trust

Organizational leaders who develop work relationships with employees could foster an organizational culture that nurtures communication and trust. McGregor's (1960) assumptions supported the idea that there might be value in developing

organizational cultures that foster leader and employee relationships that often lead to communication and trust and contribute to the organization's strength. For example, McGregor suggested two views leaders could take in developing leader and employee relationships. McGregor claimed leaders could establish a culture that assumes a controlling or influential leader and employee relationship, comparable to Herzberg's (1965) contention that relationships give meaning to work. Further supporting McGregor and Herzberg's claims is Maslow's (1943) affirmation that humans desire to belong and form relationships. Ouchi's (1981) idea is a natural progression in theory that employees may not remain with an organization without relationships. In line with McGregor's assumptions, Simon (1945) supported the idea that leaders should influence rather than force employees. Homans (1958) suggested that leader and employee contributions to relationships could initiate relationships that lead to communication and trust. Thus, leaders should be aware of how they could influence an organizational culture that could impact communication and trust in a traditional versus flexible work environment.

Leaders may struggle to nurture supportive work environments that could assist in developing a culture that values the leader and employee relationships. An organization's culture could dramatically influence how leaders and employee's work. According to Byrd (2022), an organization's culture is significant in the way the organization functions. Newman and Ford (2021) further added that effective organizations typically have strong cultures. Langer et al. (2019) suggested that the organization's values systems could prompt employee behavior. Tan (2019) further added that organizational culture might set the tone for employees' paths. Interactions of all kinds could assist leaders in creating

a solid organizational culture (Newman & Ford, 2021). Thus, the actions of a leader in a traditional versus a flexible work environment could hinder the facilitation of the organization's culture, which could impact the leader's level of communication and trust.

Leaders could find challenges in effectively influencing organizational culture in a flexible work environment. Culture is the organization's values and beliefs, evident by displaying signs, symbols, and artifacts throughout the office (Newman & Ford, 2021). In a traditional work environment, the organization's culture is typically a visual demonstration that the employees consistently see as they go about their daily activities (Newman & Ford, 2021). Employees participating in FWAs are generally not physically present to view the workplace's signs, symbols, and artifacts. In a flexible work environment, leaders may need to find alternative ways to communicate the organization's culture. For example, Martínez-Caro et al. (2020) suggested that the company website could help communicate the organizational culture and help employees interpret their work environment, which is consistent with Scott et al. (2022) findings that communicating via virtual means may significantly influence perceptions and understanding of organizational culture. A leader's challenges with communication in FWAs could go beyond solidifying organizational culture with employees who participate in FWAs to the day-to-day communication with employees that impact trust.

A leader who is influential as opposed to authoritative could be a leader who holds McGregor's theory y assumption, and may find it less challenging to establish leader and employee relationships that could lead to open communication that may create an environment of trust. Maximo et al. (2019) suggested that people could experience

less apprehension to share information openly when there are feelings of psychological safety. In comparison, Zeb et al. (2020) supported the idea that safety could result from a positive relationship between a leader and employee, and Maslow (1943) identified safety as one of the elements in the hierarchy of needs. Mysirlaki & Paraskeva, 2020 further added that in work environments like FWAs, the effectiveness of leaders could relate to trust, consistent with Chen and Sriphon's (2021) observation that the investment in the relationship could also be dependent on trust. Thus, when a leader's action demonstrates a theory x assumption, it might be challenging to build an organizational culture that establishes communication and fosters an environment of trust in support of FWAs. In comparison, leaders who aspire to theory y may find it less challenging to develop an organizational culture that fosters communication and trust in FWA environments.

COVID-19 Impact and Employee Retention

The COVID-19 pandemic might be the event that brings about change that forces a leader to recognize and accept the use of FWAs that could significantly impact employee retention. The Clean Air Act of 1970 could be said to be one of the initially influential factors for using FWAs. The Clean Air Act is one of the federal government's laws to help reduce air pollution from different sources, including mobile sources, such as automobiles (Daniels et al., 2019). Subsequently, the Clean Air Act was a potential catalyst for leaders to consider policies for using FWAs. Consistent with Daniels et al.'s (2019) findings, Stiles (2020) suggested one of the legislation's intents was to encourage the use of telework to help ease automobile traffic congestion. Before the worldwide outbreak of COVID-19 in 2019, the percentage of employees participating in FWAs was

low, indicating that federal legislation did not substantially impact the use of FWAs. For example, Feitosa and Salas (2020) reported that before COVID-19, approximately 3% of employees participated in part-time FWAs. These findings are consistent with Althoff et al.'s (2022) results of 2.4%, and Wang et al. (2021), who noted a 2.9% participation rate in FWAs. Nevertheless, at the onset of COVID-19, employers became increasingly aware that the way to continue operations might be to send employees home to work, forcing leaders into FWAs situations.

Shortly following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, several employers sent employees home to continue to work who could perform their jobs from home. Feitosa and Salas (2020) reported a 43% increase in full-time employees who worked remotely in the first few months of the pandemic in April 2020. Likewise, Galanti et al. (2021) noted that approximately 50% of employees began working from home shortly after the onset of COVID-19. Consequently, leaders who may not be advocates of FWAs may have found themselves in a position where they might not have a choice but to develop strategies to operate in an FWA environment. However, as the constraints of COVID-19 subside, reports show employers forced employees to return to their physical work location. As employers increasingly force employees back to their physical work locations, employees evaluated options to not return to the traditional work environment (Hopkins & Figaro, 2021). Leaders may have to face the reality that FWAs appears to be the future of the workplace because employees are indicating they want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19. For instance, Hirsch (2021) reported findings from a 2021 opinion survey that workers did not want to return to the daily commute and be in an

office for up to 8-hours per day. Hirsch's reported results are consistent with Green et al.'s (2020) findings that up to 90% of employees stated that they preferred FWAs and wished to continue to work-from-home and work-from-anywhere post-COVID-19. The results signify the urgency to identify and communicate the successful strategies leaders utilize with employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19 because of the potential impact on employee retention. The study aimed to address the gaps and explored the successful strategies leaders used with employees who wanted to continue FWAs post-COVID-19.

Transition

Section 1 emphasized the significance of business leaders to develop accommodating work practices post-COVID-19 for employees to continue FWAs because of the impact on employee retention. The literature review supported the focus of business leaders' strategies to build an organizational culture and employee trust through communication to facilitate the continuation of FWAs post-COVID-19 to retain employees. The component of Section 1 included the background of the problem, followed by identification of the problem statement; purpose statement; nature of the study; interview questions; operational definitions, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and significance of the study. One of the key components of Section 1 was the professional and academic literature review, which contained highlights on the subtleties of FWAs, including an analysis of McGregor's theories x and y, which serves as the conceptual framework for the study. Section 1 closed with a transition and summary followed by Section 2.

Section 2 includes the purpose statement, the role of the researcher, participants, research method, design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments, data organization technique, data analysis, reliability, and validity. Section 3 contains the presentation of findings, application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for further research, reflections, and a conclusion.

Section 2: The Project

This section includes detailed information on the development of the research method and design, population, data collection procedures, and the techniques to gather data analytics. The topics in Section 2 include a purpose statement, roles of the researcher, strategies for accessing participants and eligibility, research methods, research design, population, and sampling. In addition, I address the trustworthiness and the approach to ethical research, data collection instruments, data collection techniques, data organization techniques, data analysis, reliability, and validity. I gathered data for this study by conducting semistructured interviews with five first-line leaders in the Southwest United States. As appropriate, I included peer-reviewed sources to support decisions made for the study.

Purpose Statement

The specific business problem addressed in this research was that some first-line leaders in the Southwest United States lacked strategies for retaining employees who wanted to continue FWAs post-COVID-19. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore strategies used by some first-line leaders in the Southwest United States to retain employees who wanted to continue FWAs post-COVID-19.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in qualitative research is to be the data collection instrument. It is common in qualitative research to hear that the researcher is an instrument (Yoon & Uliassi, 2022). My role as the researcher was as the primary data collection instrument. In my role, I collected data from participants regarding their

experiences while safeguarding their integrity as a participant during the research process. Consistent with qualitative research, the researcher collects, organizes, analyzes, and interprets the data to better understand the experiences the participants discuss during the interviews (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). As the data collection instrument, the researcher has the challenge of separating themselves from the research (McGrath et al., 2019). At the time of the study, my employment position was as a procurement analyst for the United States federal government, but I did not have responsibilities to lead or manage other members of the organization. I contacted first-line leaders in the Southwest United States to collect data during the study.

Because, prior to my position at the time of the study, I was a first-line leader in a Texas federal government organization with responsibilities to lead and manage members of the organization, I was cognizant of personal biases that could influence the study results. Chun Tie et al. (2019) suggested the researcher views the world through their lens. Therefore, a researcher needs to be aware of the personal lens through which they view the world. One way to mitigate a researcher's personal bias is to conduct a self-analysis or reflect on their interpretations of the world to identify personal beliefs, which could affect the integrity of data analysis (Johnson et al., 2020). I took inventory of my personal beliefs as a first-line leader and used that awareness to remain neutral throughout the research process. A researcher is responsible for mitigating bias and being ethical. According to Cumyn et al. (2019), a researcher is responsible for being ethical while conducting research. I followed basic ethical principles for the study participants consistent with the Belmont Report.

The ethical treatment of study participants was one of my primary responsibilities as a researcher. I conducted this qualitative research based on ethical standards and Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines. In addition, I had an obligation during the research project as it relates to ethics and the Belmont Report. The aim of the Belmont Report, issued in 1979, was to publicize standards for research participants' rights and ethical treatment (Brothers et al., 2019). The three principles outlined in the Belmont Report are obligation to beneficence and justice, special protections for vulnerable individuals and populations, and respect for persons (Ferdowsian et al., 2020). I conducted the study in a manner consistent with ethical standards. I treated all the study participants with respect and ensured the safety of all participants during their participation in the research project. According to Yin (2018), a researcher should obtain informed consent, avoid deception, protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants, ensure equitable treatment, and take necessary precautions for any vulnerable groups. I established a protocol to ensure the study participants provided their consent before including individuals in the data gathering process.

One of my primary duties as the researcher was to build and maintain the participants' trust during the data collection process. Establishing protocols during case study research provides a framework for a consistent line of questioning during interviews (Yin, 2018). I conducted interviews with participants in the Southwest United States. An interview protocol served as a guide during data collection from study participants. As the interviewer, I understood my responsibility to create a comfortable atmosphere for the participant. Researchers must create a comfortable environment for

participants and encourage active involvement and engagement (McGrath et al., 2019). The use of interviews was appropriate, given the nature of the study. The interview protocol in this qualitative case study helped to provide triangulation and consistency to support the reliability and validity of the study. According to Roberts (2020), an interview protocol supports consistency in the data collection process. The interviews were structured with open-ended questions that encouraged participants to provide more expansive responses. The interview design allowed for follow-up questions to help support member checking. In addition, I had the participants review a summary of the data to ensure the information's accuracy. My goal was to conduct purposeful interviews with the participants, which took no longer than 60 minutes per interview.

Participants

The participants in a study possessed relevant experiences and were able to provide information that helped answer the research question. Saarijärvi and Bratt (2021) suggested that qualitative studies typically involve researchers understanding participants' lived experiences, often through interviews. A qualitative researcher usually relies on the voluntary participation of people who have previous experience with the central phenomenon of the research study (McGrath et al., 2019). Researchers must determine the eligibility criteria for individuals participating in the study to answer the research question (Magnuson et al., 2021). The criteria for the participants were first-line leaders in the Southwest United States who had successful strategies that they used to retain employees who wanted to continue FWAs post-COVID-19. In establishing the eligibility of the participants for the study, the first-line leaders in the Southwest United States had

leadership experience in a private sector workplace setting, had a first-line leader's role, and had successful strategies for employees who participated in FWAs. McGrath et al. (2019) asserted that including individuals with relevant perspectives and characteristics is necessary to support and align with the research objectives. In qualitative research, researchers strive to include individuals in the data collection efforts with diverse backgrounds and views to address the research question (McGrath et al., 2019). Yin (2018) further added that to ensure participant legitimacy, participants must demonstrate knowledge and experience to help support interview validity. All of the individuals in the study from the Southwest United States contributed to answering the study's central research question. Eligible participants for the study participated because they used successful strategies with employees who wanted to continue FWAs post-COVID-19. Establishing the participant eligibility criteria facilitated gaining access to the participants.

The strategy I used to access participants was to use my professional networks, specifically a professional colleague, to identify participants who met the criteria and make initial contact via email. Selecting and gaining access to the right participants is essential in research studies (Condon et al., 2019). Upon identifying the initial participant through a professional network, I used the snowball technique to identify additional participants who met the eligibility criteria and made initial contact via email. These efforts allowed for the identification of appropriate study participants. In the consent form email, I introduced myself, explained the purpose of the study, and asked if they would like to participate. The email established a relationship with potential participants

and began discussions on the details of the interview protocol. Through the initial personal contact with the potential study participants, my goal was to establish trust, rapport, a positive working relationship, and confidence. Riese (2019) emphasized that the researcher should develop rapport with the study participants. In addition, creating a working and trusting relationship is consistent with the researcher's responsibility to demonstrate care for study participants (Fernandez et al., 2021). As the researcher, I strived to establish trust with all participants to facilitate productive data collection efforts.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

In this study, I used the qualitative method to explore strategies some first-line leaders in the Southwest United States used to retain employees who wanted to continue FWAs post-COVID-19. The three research methods include quantitative, qualitative, and mixed (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). I selected the qualitative method because my research required a deep understanding of the real-life experiences of the first-line leaders in the Southwest United States. Researchers use qualitative studies to explore the experiences of the study participants (Florczak, 2019). The approach allows the researcher to concentrate on feedback from individuals who can provide a deep understanding of the phenomenon under study (Busetto et al., 2020). The qualitative method provided a setting to use open-ended questions to explore this underexplored phenomenon. Qualitative researchers use the method as a data collecting tool to gather responses to questions (Braun et al., 2021). Qualitative researchers use open-ended

questions to discover reasons for observed patterns in how individuals view their world; these questions allow the interviewee more control over how they describe their experiences (Braun et al., 2021). An open-ended question invites individuals to express what is and is not their experience and describe their perceptions of a phenomenon (Braun et al., 2021). The qualitative research method aids in explaining the reasons, motivations, and behaviors of a particular target population (Aspers & Corte, 2019). The qualitative method was best suited for my study because I attempted to understand the meaning behind the participant's responses.

The quantitative and mixed-method approaches were not suitable to explore strategies some first-line leaders in the Southwest United States used to retain employees who wanted to continue FWAs post-COVID-19. In contrast, quantitative researchers analyze numerical data to test hypotheses and obtain statistical measures rather than explore phenomena (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). Quantitative analysis is a method that uses mathematical models or advanced statistics to analyze the significance of the hypothesis (Strijker et al., 2020). Quantitative research methods can aid in understanding why people take on specific behaviors, yet qualitative methods assist researchers in understanding how and why such behaviors occur (Aspers & Corte, 2019). In my research, I intended to understand why the behaviors occur. Mixed methods research includes qualitative and quantitative elements (Timans et al., 2019). The theoretical foundation of the mixed-method approach is to leverage the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of the qualitative and quantitative research methods (Ozturk & Sahin, 2019). The study's purpose did not focus on variables' characteristics or relationships. The

purpose was to explore leaders' strategies for retaining employees who wanted to continue FWAs post-COVID-19. I did not test hypotheses that are part of a quantitative study or the quantitative portion of a mixed-method study. Thus, the qualitative method was more appropriate for the study than a quantitative or mixed-method approach.

Research Design

A research design provides a logical plan to pursue when answering a research question. The researcher has several research design options available when conducting a qualitative research study (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). I considered three of those research designs for my qualitative research study. The three designs considered for this qualitative research study on leaders' strategies for retaining employees who wanted to continue FWAs post-COVID-19 were case study, phenomenology, and ethnography. Grounded theory was not considered and was not a suitable research design because it was outside the study's scope to create a theory. The single case study design was the most appropriate for this qualitative research study.

The case study research design enables the researcher to explore the complexity of a case in the complete way possible through in-depth data collection. A case study involves multiple types and sources of information and the reporting of descriptive themes (Yin, 2018). The case study researcher focuses on a case with specific qualities of an individual or organization (Crilly, 2019). A qualitative researcher uses the single case study research design to study more than one subcase within a single case (Hoorani et al., 2019). According to Yin (2018), a single case study is appropriate when the environment or situation is unique. The single, unique environment or situation I studied was first-line

leaders’ strategies in the Southwest United States to retain employees who wanted to continue FWAs post-COVID-19. Other qualitative research designs I considered for my study were phenomenological and ethnography research designs.

The two other qualitative research designs, phenomenological and ethnography, were not the appropriate designs for this study. A phenomenological research design is a way to gather a group of people's similar experiences (Gunawan et al., 2021). The phenomenological research design also analyzes the meanings of individuals' lived experiences to understand an individual's emotional response to their experiences (Nicholls, 2019). I did not analyze the experiences of a group of leaders; instead, I studied individual leaders' experiences; thus, the phenomenological design was not appropriate for this study. The ethnography design is the study of group cultures through observing the participants (Wood & Mattson, 2019). Studying group culture was not the intent of this study; therefore, ethnography was not a suitable choice. For these reasons, neither the phenomenological research nor ethnography design was appropriate for this study. A goal of the researcher is to include enough study participants to achieve data saturation.

My approach was to reach data saturation through triangulation by collecting and analyzing multiple data sources. Researchers collect and analyze multiple data sources in the case study design to reach data saturation (Alam, 2020). I conducted semistructured interviews as one of the sources of data. Other data sources included participants' disclosure about employee retention and a review of the participant's organization's websites for pertinent information about FWAs. I conducted five semistructured

interviews with first-line leaders in the Southwest United States. Chen et al. (2020) stated that most new information arises at five to six interviews; generally, no new information surfaces as the sample size increases. Data saturation occurs when the researcher is confident that nothing new or surprising will arise from additional data gathering and that further information would be repetitive, or the researcher no longer receives new information (Thorne, 2020). To reach data saturation with the interviews, I transcribed each interview, provided the participant with a copy of each question along with a concise synthesis of their response to the question, and asked if the synthesis represented their answer or if they wished to provide further information about the answer. I continued the member checking process with the interview participants until the information was repetitive. Researchers use language like data saturation to indicate a thorough search of all relevant sources of evidence and ensure a sufficient amount of quality information is available to sustain the study (Chen et al., 2020). The objective was to obtain enough data through multiple sources to understand successful strategies used by some first-line leaders in the Southwest United States to retain employees who wanted to continue FWAs post-COVID-19. I interviewed participants until the responses were repetitive and no new information emerged. I compared the participant responses to the additional data sources where no new information emerged, signaling the achievement of data saturation.

Population and Sampling

Defining the Population

In this single case study, the population consisted of five first-line leaders in the Southwest United States who have used successful strategies to retain employees who wanted to continue FWAs post-COVID-19. In establishing the criteria of the participants for the study, the first-line leaders in the Southwest United States had leadership experience in a private sector workplace, had a first-line leader's role, and had successful strategies for employees who participate in FWAs. There were several leaders in the Southwest United States that met the participant criteria. A qualitative researcher usually relies on the voluntary participation of people who have previous experience with the central phenomenon of the research study (McGrath et al., 2019). McGrath et al. (2019) further added that including individuals with relevant perspectives and characteristics is necessary to support and align with the research objectives. Chen et al. (2020) suggested it is possible to reach data saturation by interviewing as few as five participants. Even though several first-line leaders within the population of the Southwest United States met the participant criteria, I established a limit on the number of participants to interview to a minimum of five participants.

Sampling

In this single case study, I used purposeful sampling to recruit potential participants for this study. I collected data from five purposefully sampled first-line leaders in the Southwest United States. A researcher uses purposeful sampling for qualitative research because this form of sampling ensures an understanding of the

research problem under study by selecting participants that meet the study criteria (Kalu, 2019). Galehdar et al. (2020) further added that purposeful sampling is appropriate for qualitative research as it allows the researcher to select participants to reach the study's objectives. Furthermore, Alam (2020) suggested that the primary focus of purposeful sampling is on data saturation and obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Purposeful sampling was the primary sampling approach, and snowball sampling was the secondary sampling approach to recruit study participants.

I used snowball sampling as a secondary approach in recruiting study participants. Snowball sampling involves the researcher asking study participants to recommend others who meet the criteria for participation in the study (Bhardwaj, 2019). The criteria for the participants were first-line leaders in the Southwest United States who have successful strategies for leading employees who participate in FWAs. I interviewed participants using a semistructured interview process designed to elicit their experiences addressing employees who participate in FWAs. I asked the interview questions in the interview protocol (see Appendix) to gather data and information about successful strategies for leading employees who participate in FWAs. The participants had the option of a face-to-face interview, phone interview, or Zoom interview. Leader one (L1) and leader two (L2) choose the face-to-face interview, leader three (L3), leader four (L4), and leader five (L5) choose to interview via Zoom. In addition, the participants were free to select a place to participate in the interview. L1, L2, and L5 interviews were at their homes, while L3 and L4 were at alternate locations unidentifiable using Zoom video background filter.

Data Saturation and Sampling

Determining the sample size for qualitative research is significant for collecting information and data saturation. Researchers use their experience to determine the number of participants that will lead to data saturation (Braun & Clarke, 2021). I achieved data saturation when I no longer received new data relevant to the central research question. I used member checking to validate the credibility of the data. Member checking allows the participants to review their interview responses, correct inaccurate interpretations, and provide additional information. Data saturation occurs when the researcher begins to receive redundant or no new information during the data gathering process (Guest et al., 2020). Johnson et al. (2020) further added that data saturation is when data collection and analysis produce no new data addressing the research question. Data saturation is complete when there is no new information from the participants and when what the participants convey in the interview is consistent with the information found in the additional data sources. I continued questioning the five participants until all data were repetitive and no new information emerged among the data sources. Determining the sample size depends on different factors and is not specific to the number of participants for any given study.

In this study, I used a set population that fits the criteria for the study. Yin (2018) found that no precise number of participants will constitute a predicable sample size. Smaller sample sizes can be appropriate when the researcher anticipates collecting usable data from each participant, which translates into fewer participants (Busetto et al., 2020). Because the set population is first-line leaders who possess successful strategies in

FWAs, there was an anticipation of collecting usable data from each participant. Aguboshim (2021) argued that the researcher relies on their judgment and experience to justify the sample size. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), smaller studies achieve data saturation more quickly than more extensive studies. Gill (2020) further added when the researcher intends to study a particular case, the sample size should be small enough for sufficient data analysis. In qualitative studies, smaller sample sizes with rich data reflect quality data and are more effective than larger sample sizes without quality content (Gill, 2020). Chen et al. (2020) suggested that a researcher can achieve data saturation with as few as five participants. Therefore, with the expectation of usable data from each participant, a smaller sample size of five participants was appropriate for this study.

The strategy to gain access to the participants was to use professional networks to include colleagues, professional organizations, such as the Association for Talent Development, and fellow students from previous educational programs. The use of professional networks assisted in identifying those who met the participant criteria. I contacted a colleague via email and requested their consent to interview as part of the ethical research process. The initial contact consented to the interview and offered four other contacts who met the participant criteria that I contacted via email to request their consent to interview.

Ethical Research

Ethics is a vital part of conducting research in a study. As the researcher, I had an ethical duty to protect all research participants. Thus, a researcher's primary responsibility is to perform research ethically and adhere to the Belmont Report's guidelines. According

to Earl (2020), the Belmont Report serves as the guiding ethical document to protect the rights of human subjects and participants involved in research. I used the principles of the Belmont Report as a guide to ensure ethical compliance for all participants who volunteered to take part in the study and conducted the series of interviews properly. In ethical research, the three elements to consider are informed consent information, the participant's understanding of information, and voluntarism (Ferdowsian et al., 2020). Dankar et al. (2019) suggested that informed consent is a critical element for protecting research participants' welfare. I notified all five participants about the study's objectives and that involvement in the study was strictly voluntary. I also provided an informed consent form and obtained the participant's consent to participate in the study.

The top priority is to secure informed consent while identifying the appropriate participants to achieve a successful study outcome. Informed consent is the freedom of individuals to participate or decline participation in a study in which the purpose and goals of the study are explained (Yin, 2018). The informed consent process involves asking participants to complete a consent form containing details about the study's purpose, the significance of the study, length of participation, possible risks to participants, and confidentiality arrangements (Glaser et al., 2020). Receiving informed consent started with obtaining approval from Walden University's IRB and receipt of an IRB approval number before conducting the interview process. When I received IRB approval and the approval number (approval no. 09-12-22-1066696), I emailed the initial participant the informed consent form. I requested the participant's response stating "I consent" by replying to the consent form email. I provided the informed consent form to

the additional four participants via email upon receiving their contact information from the initial participant. I received consent from all five participants. Consent means that the participants were informed and had sufficient information to make a conformed consent in the decision to participate (Ricketts et al., 2019). The consent form for this study included interview procedures, voluntary nature of the study, risks and benefits of being in the study, privacy, contact information for questions about participating in the study, and the IRB approval number.

Participants could withdraw from the research at any point during the study. Study participants have the right to notify the researcher of their desire to withdraw from a study if they become uncomfortable or no longer desire to assist with data collection efforts (Fernandez Lynch, 2020). Study participants should trust the researcher and be cognizant of the research process's pertinent information (Wong et al., 2021). I advised the participants that I would respect their decision to withdraw at any time, even if the participant decided to join the study initially. To withdraw from the study, the participants would have submitted an email stating the decision to withdraw or inform the researcher during the interview. I explained the procedures for withdrawal at the beginning of the interview. For example, when a participant elects to withdraw during the interview process, I would have terminated the interview, thanked them for their time, and destroyed all data from that participant. Participants electing to withdraw from the study other than during the interview would have emailed me a written response stating their intent to withdraw. I would have thanked them for their time and destroyed all data from that participant. The five participants continued to participate throughout the study.

Some researchers entice participants to join in the research by providing incentives to participate.

Researchers choose whether to use financial or other incentives to encourage participants to contribute to a study (Archibald et al., 2019). I did not offer any monetary incentives for participation in the study; however, I informed all study participants that the study results would be accessible upon request. In addition, I assured the participants that the information they shared and their confidentiality would be secured.

Qualitative researchers must protect the confidentiality of all participants in their research study. According to Farrugia (2019), privacy breaches can harm the participants if stakeholders can identify participants due to inadequate confidentiality safeguards. Thus, data protection and confidentiality are necessary for the participants and organizations in the study.

The researcher is responsible for securing the research data containing personal information. Researchers must maintain the confidentiality of the participants and the data collected for the research study (Surmiak, 2020). Given the potential vulnerability of study participants, protecting the well-being and privacy of study participants through various methods is vital in research (Farrugia, 2019). To ensure compliance with ethical principles, I maintained the study data on an encrypted thumb drive and will store for up to 5 years in a locked safe. Following the 5 years, I will purge the data on the thumb drive. Myers et al. (2020) suggested that coding will help to ensure confidentiality and the research participants' privacy. I protected the names of the participants in this study by using pseudonyms to protect the identity of individuals. The pseudonyms for this

study's five leaders were L1, L2, L3, L4, and L5. Any information that may reveal the participants remained safeguarded and private.

Data Collection Instruments

I served as the primary data collection instrument. I used semistructured interviews to explore strategies five first-line leaders used to retain employees who wanted to continue FWAs post-COVID-19. The researcher is the primary data collection instrument in qualitative research because the researcher collects, organizes, analyzes, and interprets the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). Qualitative research allows the researcher to choose from several data collection methods, including documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts (Yin, 2018). I conducted semistructured interviews and used document reviews as data sources during the study. Researchers use semistructured interviews because it is a data collection technique that allows the researcher to query interviewees by asking open-ended questions (Busetto et al., 2020). The semistructured interview included six open-ended questions which addressed the overarching research question. The five participants were asked the same six questions in the same order.

I followed the interview protocol (see Appendix) to facilitate a timely and consistent interview approach with the participants. According to Roberts (2020), following an interview guide helps conduct qualitative interviews. In addition, the interview protocol allows participants to reflect on the research topics with thought and purpose (Braaten et al., 2020). Fusch and Ness (2015) suggested that using follow-up questions helps ensure data saturation. I used follow-up questions to ensure that the

responses from the participants were thorough and complete and assisted with data saturation. Before the interview, I reviewed the participant's email response to the informed consent form with each individual before starting the question-and-answer part of the session to establish trust and rapport with the participant. It is helpful for the interviewer to attempt to build trust with the participant at the beginning of the interview (Grant et al., 2019). I allowed up to 60 minutes for each interview. I used the computer sound recorder and iPhone voice memo recording devices to capture L1 and L2's interviews and the computer sound recorder and Zoom recorder for L3, L4, and L5's interviews to make transcription easier.

Along with the semistructured interviews as the primary data source, I collected data from additional sources to improve the credibility of the findings. I requested that the participant provide relevant nonproprietary information about their organization's FWAs policies and procedures. The participants shared information associated with employee retention after instituting the strategies and companywide surveys about preference for FWAs and trust. In addition, I retrieved documents from the participant's organization's websites about the future of the workplace. The documents served as another additional data source for this study. The additional data sources assisted in the data triangulation and member checking to ensure the reliability and validity of the research study.

I ensured the reliability and validity of the study using triangulation. Triangulation involves the use of various sources of data collection to mitigate bias and potential shortfalls of a single data collection technique (Natow, 2020). The use of member

checking helps the researcher validate the accuracy and reliability of data collection (Candela, 2019). Member checking includes providing research participants with copies of data analysis for feedback (Motulsky, 2021). I allowed interview participants to review and comment on my interpretation of the data collected during the interview. The participants' determined that my interpretation of their interview responses provided for member checking was accurate. There were no follow-up interviews after the member checking process. The various sources of data and verification approaches furthered the study's integrity.

Data Collection Technique

My data collection process included semistructured interviews to reveal strategies some first-line leaders in the Southwest United States used to retain employees who wanted to continue FWAs post-COVID-19. I also included the participants' disclosure about employee retention after instituting the strategies and the results of companywide surveys about preference for FWAs and trust in leaders. In addition, I retrieved documents from the participant's organization's websites about the future of the workplace. According to McGrath et al. (2019), interviews remain a viable data collection technique in qualitative research. Nassaji (2020) further added that interviews represent one of the most common ways of collecting data in qualitative research because interviews allow researchers to obtain rich and interpretable data. Asking participants open-ended questions allows them to have the freedom of expression and provides participants with the opportunity to share their personal experiences (Yin, 2018). To

safeguard consistency during the data collection process, I used an interview protocol (see Appendix) to guide the interviews.

The interview protocol I followed included beginning the session with an overview of the study, reviewing the consent form, obtaining permission to record the interview, asking the established questions to the participant with relevant follow-up questions, and explaining the member checking process after the session. Researchers should develop an interview protocol or guide to ensure consistency during interactions with study participants (Saddour, 2020). During the interview, I took notes on the participants' physical mannerisms, such as expressions and tones, as they answered the questions. I recorded all interviews for video and audio documentation and then transcribed those notes. The content from interview transcripts and the researcher's notes provides a data source for qualitative studies (Nasheeda et al., 2019). I was courteous and professional while conducting the interviews to ensure that the participants remained comfortable throughout the interview process. Each interview took no longer than 60 minutes to complete the introduction, interview, and conclusion. When conducting interviews, a researcher should know the advantages and disadvantages of interviewing study participants.

The advantages of using a semistructured interview process are the flexibility around the structure of the interview that allows the researcher the opportunity to enhance questions throughout the interview process (McGrath et al., 2019) and allows researchers to strengthen the relational focus with the participant to improve engagement (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The disadvantages of using a semistructured interview

process include not having a well-developed interview guide for asking relevant open-ended questions (Roberts, 2020). McGrath et al. (2019) argued that semistructured interviews may cause problems for researchers who serve as interviewers because of the possibility of asking follow-up questions to steer participants to a preconceived conclusion. Researchers could underestimate the resources required to recruit participants, interview them effectively, and transcribe the data (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). To mitigate this disadvantage, I used a well-developed interview protocol (see Appendix). I obtained validation of the interview protocol through committee review and approval of the proposal. To assist in identifying themes, I used a software tool to analyze and store the data collected.

The NVivo software helps identify common themes and characteristics from the document analysis. NVivo is a software package with functions for coding texts or images that allow the user to match the evidence and make connections (Feng & Behar-Horenstein, 2019). An advantage of importing data into NVivo is that the storage and location of the research study data are in one place. A disadvantage of importing data in NVivo and utilizing the soft copy is that emerging themes may not be evident and substantial data could be missing from the document review (Cypress, 2019). Feng and Behar-Horenstein (2019) found that by using NVivo software, the researcher can manage the information in a single location, such as text, spreadsheets, audio, video, or images, and add, modify, and connect cross-reference data. Using the NVivo software further enhances the coding of themes, thus creating an acceptable protocol for classifying and

analyzing the research data. Along with NVivo, I used member checking to ensure the accuracy of the participant's responses during the interview.

Using member checking to support the data's trustworthiness and conducting follow-up interviews with the participants ensured that all questions responses were accurate and correct. According to Candela (2019), member checking is helpful in validating and verifying the trustworthiness of data, including the accuracy and interpretation of the interviews. I transcribed each interview. Then provided the participant a copy of each question with a concise synthesis of their response to the question and asked if the synthesis represented their answer or if they wished to provide further information about their response. I continued to question participants until all data were repetitive and no new information emerged among the data sources. Member checking is an effective way to determine the data collection's reliability (Motulsky, 2021). Moreover, data analysis is essential in qualitative research (Ravindran, 2019). I continued to analyze the transcripts, information participants shared about their employee retention after instituting the strategies, results of companywide surveys about preference for FWAs and trust in leaders, and the participant's organization's websites for pertinent information about the future of the workplace to capture the themes within the data sources.

Data Organization Technique

I used dependable organization techniques to keep track of data throughout the study. The researcher's ability to properly organize data using effective organization techniques for tracking could improve a researcher's ability to retrieve and analyze data

(Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021). I video and audio recorded the participant's responses during the interview. Following the interviews, I transcribed the recordings using Microsoft Word. According to Wijayanto et al. (2021), Microsoft is an effective tool for qualitative data storage. Protecting the identity of study participants and the confidentiality of the data should be the researcher's top priority (Cox et al., 2019). I saved each recording and Microsoft Word document according to the interview date and stored the interviews in a specific file on my personal computer and external thumb drive. I secured my computer using an explicit password that is solely known to me, and I always locked my computer when not in use. During the interview sessions, I took notes on my general impressions of the discussion, such as the flow of the conversation and my overall perceptions of the interview encounter. Taking notes is helpful and serves as an aid for the researcher's organizational efforts during qualitative studies (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021). I locked hard copies of notes and external thumb drives, storing study material in a safe in my residence. The organization of files on hard drives, thumb drives, and software like NVivo allowed for sufficient data tracking throughout the study.

I imported the Microsoft Word interview transcripts into the NVivo software application for qualitative analysis. Each participant was properly labeled and organized by letters of reference, such as L1, L2, L3, L4, and L5. I used the NVivo software application to identify emerging themes from the interview transcripts, nonproprietary documents, and notes. According to Korsgaard and Linneberg (2019), the conceptual approach to coding reduces a large amount of data. Coding makes the data readily accessible while increasing its quality through color-coding specific critical themes

identified through the qualitative analysis (Korsgaard & Linneberg, 2019). Yin (2018) stated that documents, materials, and narratives with participants are necessary to increase transparency when conducting qualitative research. To protect the rights of the participants, I maintained all raw data collected during the study in a secure, locked safe in my residence for a period not to exceed 5 years. All hardcopy and electronic documentation from each participant's interview were transferred to an external thumb drive and stored in the safe in my residence. I will destroy the data collected from this study, including deleting the files on the thumb drive after 5 years. I also will shred all written data at the end of the 5-year retention period.

Data Analysis

Collecting, interpreting, and understanding data assist qualitative researchers in answering the research question. Yin (2018) defined data analysis as a process researchers use to arrange, evaluate, and interpret information gathered during the data collection process. Popenoe et al. (2021) further added that data analysis is a tool for collecting, filtering, and organizing data to arrive at conclusions about the data. During the data analysis phase of the study, I followed a logical and sequential process to analyze my notes, the content of the interview transcripts, the participants' disclosure about employee retention, and documents from the participant's organization's websites about the future of the workplace. The use of thematic analysis assisted in identifying successful strategies first-line leaders used in FWAs to retain employees post-COVID-19.

I followed Braun and Clarke's 6-step model for thematic analysis. The 6-step model facilitates a two-way flow of information and an ongoing reflective process. Step 1

is to become familiar with the data by transcribing each interview and performing multiple reviews of the transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once the interviews were complete, I transcribed the interview recording into Microsoft Word and immersed myself in the data by accomplishing multiple reviews of the interview transcripts. In step 1, I began triangulating the transcripts and the secondary data source by detailing my thoughts about the potential coding of varying themes of the primary and secondary data in the analysis.

Steps 2 and 3 generate initial codes and search for themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I manually coded the transcribed interviews and secondary data source and used the NVivo software program to validate the manual coding and develop themes. According to Williams and Moser (2019), coding in qualitative research is a process that enables the assembly, categorization, and thematic sorting of data that provides a systematic platform for the construction of meaning. I imported the Microsoft Word interview transcripts into the NVivo software application for qualitative analysis to organize and label the data to identify codes. NVivo software is a tool to assist in identifying patterns, developing themes, and the organization of the data into main themes (Feng & Behar-Horenstein, 2019). I kept notes on coding the primary and secondary themes and identified significant patterns from the data relating to the research question.

Steps 4 and 5 review themes and continue to analyze and refine the specifics of each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I continued to refine the primary and secondary themes by reviewing the data for consistency, new themes, and excluding previous

themes to ensure the validity of the themes. I used the NVivo software program to validate that all themes aligned with the data. I finalized the codes and themes and provided a description to relate the themes to the research questions. Cassell and Bishop (2019) suggested that themes capture something important about the data to the research question and represent some link between the responses or meaning within the data set. I considered the themes in all the data source's significant themes and those that appeared in just one data source to represent minor themes. For proper context, I compared the key themes and findings from the study with those published in the relevant extant literature, new studies published after my data collection efforts, and the ideologies of McGregor's theories x and y. Step 6 is to produce the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To conclude, I discussed the findings included in Section 3 of the study.

In qualitative research, data triangulation uses multiple methods of data sources to develop and understand the phenomena (Natow, 2020). Triangulation is a research strategy that uses multiple data sources to ensure the data analysis is accurate and comprehensive (Moon, 2019). Abdalla (2019) identified four types of triangulations: data, theoretical, researcher, and methodological triangulation. Researchers commonly use methodological triangulation in qualitative case studies (Farquhar et al., 2020). Methodological triangulation is when the researcher gathers data from multiple sources to explore the phenomenon under study (Godfroid et al., 2020). I used methodological triangulation with additional data collection sources to compare and validate the consistency of the information from each data source. The primary data source was the semistructured interviews. I analyzed information provided by the participants about

employee retention after instituting the strategies, results of companywide surveys about preference for FWAs and trust in leaders, and documents retrieved from the participant's organization's website about the future of the workplace as the secondary data sources. I manually coded the secondary data sources and used the NVivo software program to assist with validating the manual coding and developing themes.

Reliability and Validity

Researchers who conduct qualitative studies should establish the use of rigorous processes to confirm the reliability and validity of the study. According to Nassaji (2020), the measure for assessing qualitative work depends on the reliability and validity of the study. Reliability refers to the researcher's ability to replicate or produce consistent results throughout the study (Nassaji, 2020). Validity refers to the consistency and trustworthiness of the study (Hayashi et al., 2019). The qualitative researcher strives to ensure that their research study achieves trustworthiness. The four trustworthiness principles accepted by qualitative researchers and discussed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) consist of dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability. In the following section, I detailed the significance of how dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability contribute to the reliability and validity of a qualitative research study.

Reliability

Researchers who conduct qualitative studies should establish rigorous processes to foster reliability and demonstrate the study's dependability. According to Abib et al. (2019), reliability is essential to provide evidence for the research's accuracy. Stenfors et al. (2020) further added that reliability refers to the researcher's ability to replicate or

produce consistent results in the study. Yin (2018) asserted that research is dependable when the findings demonstrate the accurate depiction of strategies utilizing multiple sources of evidence. Dependability and rigor are strategies researchers use to ensure reliability in qualitative research (Cypress, 2019). The researcher establishes reliability by demonstrating dependability. Examples of ways to improve the study's dependability included member checking, transcript review, and interview protocol. In comparison, a researcher can demonstrate trustworthiness by defining the business problem, purpose, study participants, data collection methods, data analysis, expert validation of the research questions, and concluding with the research findings.

A researcher can achieve accuracy and consistency using a multi-method approach such as methodological triangulation. Natow (2020) defined methodological triangulation as the use of various sources of data collection to mitigate bias and potential shortfalls of a single data collection technique. Researchers should use a minimum of two data sources when using methodological triangulation (Campbell et al., 2022). The ability to achieve dependability is to provide details about the collected data to assist future researchers in obtaining similar results.

To achieve dependability, a researcher will describe their data collection and analysis process. A researcher achieves dependability when they describe in enough detail for someone to follow the same steps in their data collection and analysis process (Stenfors et al., 2020). According to Yin (2018), research is dependable when the findings demonstrate the accurate depiction of strategies utilizing multiple sources of evidence. A researcher demonstrates dependability by using an interview protocol,

transcript reviews, member checking, and data saturation strategies. The use of an interview protocol provides for consistency in the data collection (Roberts, 2020). Following an interview protocol should advance the trustworthiness and reliability of the study. I followed an interview protocol with all study participants by diligently asking the five study participants the same interview questions in the same sequence. A member checking aspect is reviewing the interview transcript to establish reliability and demonstrate the dependability of the information collected during the interview process (Yin, 2018). In addition, Motulsky (2021) asserted that member checking includes giving research participants a copy of the transcription of the interview to provide feedback on the researcher's interpretation. I provided an opportunity for interview participants to review, comment, identify errors, and challenge what they perceived as incorrect interpretations of their responses during the interview. The member checking process verified that my interpretations of the participant's response were accurate and that no new information emerged.

Achieving data saturation could improve the dependability of the research study results. According to Thorne (2020), data saturation occurs when no new information emerges from additional information. I ensured that the data collection for the study established reliability by utilizing methodological triangulation to ensure data saturation. Methodological triangulation refers to obtaining multiple data types in a study to compare and validate the conclusions and recommendations (Godfroid et al., 2020). Using methodological triangulation reduces the risk of the study's conclusions reflecting only the bias toward a specific collection method (Moon, 2019). I used methodological

triangulation with additional data collection sources. The primary data source was the semistructured interviews. The secondary data sources were the participants' disclosure about employee retention after instituting the strategies, results of companywide surveys about preference for FWAs and trust in leaders, and a review of the participant's organization's websites for information about the future of the workplace. Using methodological triangulation with the primary and secondary data sources improved the reliability and validity of the study.

Data reliability also depends on the researcher's ability to mitigate personal biases. Researcher reflexivity during the data collection process relates to the researcher's awareness of their personal feelings that could influence the data collection and analysis process (Johnson et al., 2020). I practiced awareness and self-reflection to mitigate the effects of my personal biases during the study's data collection and analysis phases. In a research study, dependability indicates reliability, while credibility, transferability, and confirmability indicate validity.

Validity

While reliability is vital to research quality, reliability alone may not provide the adequacy to achieve validity in qualitative research. Establishing trustworthiness could be a way to achieve validity in qualitative research studies. One way to increase the trustworthiness of a study is to maintain ongoing contact with study participants (Peterson et al., 2021). Maintaining contact with the participants can ensure that the interpretation of the responses is accurate. I used member checking to confirm that what I recorded was the correct response. According to McNurr et al. (2021), trustworthiness is

a technique researchers can use to influence others that their research findings are accurate. Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified the four components of trustworthiness as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is confidence in the truth of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability demonstrates that the findings have applicability in another context, and dependability reveals consistent findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability is the extent to which the respondents shape the findings of the study, and not researcher bias shapes the findings of a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I performed member checking, methodological triangulation, and practiced self-reflection to mitigate the effects of personal biases to aid in establishing the research study's trustworthiness. According to FitzPatrick (2019), validity also ensures that the findings of the research address three components: credibility, transferability, and confirmability. One of the ways to achieve validity is to establish credibility.

Credibility

Qualitative researchers strive for their research data to be creditable. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described credibility as the confidence in the trustworthiness of research data, including the participant's views and the interpretation by the researcher. Hayes and Lemon (2020) further added that credibility is in the truth of the response from the participants. I ensured credibility by strictly following an interview protocol, recording all interviews to validate the information using the member checking technique, triangulated the data by reviewing relevant nonproprietary information about the participant's employee retention and reviewed the participant's organizations websites for

pertinent information about FWAs. Data validation is essential to establish accuracy (Johnson et al., 2020). Therefore, I asked the participants to confirm the interpretations of the responses they provided during the interview to ensure the accuracy of the understanding of the information and used triangulation to support the outcomes of the research.

Transferability

A researcher could contribute to the existing literature by ensuring the results of their data analysis can transfer beyond the bounds of their research study. FitzPatrick (2019) described transferability as the degree to which the study may be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings. FitzPatrick further added that researchers focus on the study's results when they consider transferability and how the context may apply in different settings. I conveyed the study's transferability by providing specific information about the study's results and the data analysis process, interview process, participants' selection criteria, and the interview protocol, which may assist other researchers in better understanding the results of the research. According to Kornuta and Germaine (2019), a detailed description of the research process and the results of the study could be helpful to other researchers in understanding the basis of a research study and provide researchers with information that can be transferable to other contexts. I provided proper context for the study, so readers could understand how to interpret the conclusions from the data analysis. The results of this study may provide leaders with employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19 with strategies in FWAs.

Confirmability

A researcher can ensure confirmability upon establishing dependability, credibility, and transferability. Hayes and Lemon (2020) described confirmability as a strategy to address whether the interpretations and findings from the participants' experiences are not the bias or options of the researcher. According to Johnson et al. (2020), researchers should be aware of their personal feelings that could influence the data collection and analysis process. A researcher achieves confirmability when independent, objective individuals come to a similar conclusion on the relevance, meaning, and truthfulness of the study's findings (Nassaji, 2020). I asked probing questions during the interviews to obtain more in-depth data, conducted member checking to verify the data's interpretation, triangulated the data sources, and practiced self-reflection to mitigate the effects of personal biases. Thus, the researcher could establish dependability, creditability, transferability, and confirmability by reaching data saturation.

Data Saturation

I continued to collect and analyze data until the information became repetitive. Thorne (2020) found that data saturation occurs when it is evident that no new information will emerge. Fusch and Ness (2015) asserted that data saturation is the instant in the research where no new information is being observed by asking the participants questions. Johnson et al. (2020) contended that data saturation is when data collection and analysis produce no new data addressing the research question. More importantly, Guest et al. (2020) argued that data saturation was the most acceptable way

of guaranteeing qualitative rigor. Therefore, data saturation is a gauge researchers can use to know when to suspend data collection and analysis. I reached data saturation through member checking and methodological triangulation by exhausting every opportunity to gather new data. Reaching data saturation and establishing dependability, creditability, transferability, and confirmability could indicate the research study's reliability and validity.

Transition and Summary

This qualitative case study aimed to explore strategies that some first-line leaders in the Southwest United States used to retain employees who wanted to continue FWAs post-COVID-19. The intent was to use the qualitative method to explore some first-line leaders' strategies to retain employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19. According to Florczak (2019), a researcher uses the qualitative research method to explore the experiences of the study participants. Included in Section 2 of the study was the purpose statement, role of the researcher, participants, research method, research design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments, data collection technique, data organization techniques, data analysis, reliability and validity, and the transition and summary. In Section 3, I present the study's results, the applications to professional practice, the implications for social change, the recommendations for action, the recommendations for further research, my reflections, and the conclusion to the study.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies that some first-line leaders in the Southwest United States used to retain employees who wanted to continue FWAs post-COVID-19. The data came from first-line leader semistructured interviews, participants' disclosure about employee retention, and a review of the participant's organization's websites for pertinent information about the future of the workplace at one company in the Southwest United States. The findings showed successful strategies that the leaders used in FWAs to retain employees who wanted to continue FWAs post-COVID-19.

Presentation of the Findings

The research question for this qualitative single case study was as follows: What strategies do some first-line leaders in the Southwest United States use to retain employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19? To answer this question, I conducted semistructured interviews with five first-line leaders from one organization in the Southwest United States who used strategies for retaining employees who wanted to continue FWAs post-COVID-19. Each of the five first-line leaders responded to semistructured, open-ended questions focused on identifying successful strategies they used to retain employees who wanted to continue FWAs post-COVID-19. The participants verified the interpretation accuracy of their responses, and the themes reflected their agreement with their responses. In addition, the participants disclosed results about employee retention after instituting the strategies and results of

companywide surveys about preference for FWAs and trust in leaders. A search of the organization's website produced public documents written by the executive who shaped the organization's direction regarding the future of the workplace. The primary and secondary data sources analysis revealed themes and patterns within the collected data.

I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-phase analysis to identify potential themes and patterns within the collected data and NVivo software to organize and confirm themes and patterns that emerged from the data. Cho et al. (2020) described qualitative data analysis as sorting and examining the data to identify similar phrases, patterns, and themes. Three themes emerged from the analysis of the interviews and the review of organization documentation: acknowledgment and acceptance, communication, and collaboration. Table 1 summarizes the participants and the times the themes appeared throughout the participant interviews.

Table 1

Themes and Number of Related References by Participant

Theme	No. of references	Participant
Theme 1	29	L1, L2, L3, L4, and L5
Theme 2	49	L1, L2, L3, L4, and L5
Theme 3	36	L1, L2, L3, L4, and L5
Total	114	

Theme 1: Acknowledgement and Acceptance

The first theme from the research participants' responses was acknowledgment and acceptance. All five leaders identified their acknowledgment and acceptance of FWAs as a strategy to retain employees who wanted to participate in FWAs post-COVID-19. Three subthemes emerged related to acknowledgment and acceptance: the

new workplace, preference for FWAs, and leader's practices. Table 2 summarizes the number of times participants mentioned acknowledgment and acceptance as a strategy to retain employees who wanted to continue FWAs post-COVID-19.

Table 2

Participants' References to Acknowledgment and Acceptance

Participant	No. of references	%
L1	15	52
L2	8	28
L3	4	14
L4	1	3
L5	1	3
Total	29	100

The New Workplace

In the study of this industry segment, all the participants agreed that acknowledgment and acceptance of the new workplace are the initial strategies leaders should implement to retain employees who want to participate in FWAs post-COVID-19. L1 stated that leaders should come to terms with acknowledging and accepting that there is a "new workplace." L2 affirmed, "FWAs is here to stay," and leaders should acknowledge "things are different" and "accept the new way of work." L4 and L5 suggested similar ideas of evolution in the workplace landscape. The participants' acknowledgment and acceptance of a new workplace aligned with the documents from the participant's organization's websites posted by the executive who shaped the organization's direction about the future of the workplace.

The content from the documents written by the organization's executive about the future of the workplace supports the participant's assertion of a new workplace. In document one (D1), the executive stated, "There is no going back to prepandemic expectations in which the office was accepted as the only place to produce high-quality work" and "the office might never be the same again." Document two's (D2's) content is consistent with D1 in that "Office workers probably cannot imagine going back to exactly how things were." The participants commented on the new workplace and suggested that employees prefer FWAs post-COVID-19.

Preference for FWAs

The participant responses indicated that they acknowledged employees preferred FWAs. L1 stated, "Employees expect and demand FWAs," and L2 echoed L1's claim, "The expectation is a flexible work schedule." L1 disclosed a companywide survey indicating that 80% of respondents preferred to work remotely. Consistent with the survey, the organization's executive who submitted D1 stated, "50% of the workforce reported that flexibility is more important to employee's post-pandemic." L3 further added that leaders need to accept the need to work with employees to agree upon suitable FWAs that accommodate employees' needs and follow FWA policy. Consequently, the participants agreed that those leaders who are reluctant to acknowledge and accept employees' preference for FWAs might encounter challenges in retaining employees post-COVID-19.

Leaders Practices

At the onset of COVID-19, there were no clear expectations for work; the focus was on the employee's well-being. Sull et al. (2020) reported findings consistent with the participants that at the onset of COVID-19, one of the leader's top concerns was the well-being of the employees. L1 acknowledged, "Initially, it felt like a free for all, minimal structure with the focus on the well-being of the employee." The executive who wrote D1 stated that employers made accommodations in work schedules for employees' family responsibilities. L5 commented that everyone had a learning curve with FWAs in figuring out where they fit and how to move forward in the FWA environment. As a result, leaders found themselves in a position where they needed to develop strategies to bring appropriate levels of structure into the FWA environment.

A strategy the leaders suggested was to give the employee time to process feelings associated with the structure in FWAs. L1 recognized that employees could need time to work through their feelings about the evolving structure in the workplace. L2 further added, "Avoid dictating how things will be done," listen to the employee, and "be willing to accept feedback." L3 suggested helping the employee understand that FWAs will continue to be available. As a leader, a strategy could be to allow time for the leader and employee to work through feelings brought about by the evolving structure in the workplace.

The learning curve L5 referred to could be associated with a leader's practices in an FWA environment. L1 stated, "Employees operate more independently in FWAs than in a traditional work arrangement," meaning "you are not going to see employees in the

office every day and monitor their activities." Each of the five participants identified the shift in leader practice from monitoring hours worked to employee performance. L2 stated, "Understand the shift in an FWA environment is performance, not how many hours an employee works." L3, L4, and L5 further added that there should be a shift from monitoring hours worked to setting performance expectations. Sull et al. (2020) indicated that flexible work environments create more of a performance culture. The participant's comment on shifting to performance aligned with the executives who shaped the organization's future of the workplace. The executives wrote that leaders should move away from looking at the time the employee spends at work to how they perform and what they contribute. Therefore, leaders who can shift from being authoritative to influential leaders could serve as a strategy to retain employees who want to participate in FWAs post-COVID-19.

Relevance of the Findings to the Conceptual Framework and Literature

The first theme, acknowledgment and acceptance, aligned with the conceptual framework for this study and extant literature. The conceptual framework for this study was McGregor's (1960) theories x and y, a leadership theory about organizations and management that outlines two different leaders' views about the nature of people at work. I used McGregor's leadership theory to understand first-line leaders' strategies in FWAs to retain employees post-COVID-19. Theory x is the belief that the average person dislikes work and will avoid it when given the opportunity (McGregor, 1960). A leader's support of FWAs could hinge on their beliefs and the assumptions of employee motivation. For example, with FWAs, traditional forms of social control, such as direct

supervision and physical proximity, rarely exist (Eseryel et al., 2021). A leader's belief in the traditional forms of control, direct supervision, and physical proximity could be the reason for minimal participation in FWAs before COVID-19.

The lack of employee participation in FWAs before COVID-19 could point toward the leader's view about the nature of people at work. Feitosa and Salas (2020) highlighted the underutilization of FWAs; approximately 3% of employees participated in part-time FWAs prior to COVID-19. Feitosa and Salas's findings are consistent with Althoff et al.'s (2022) results that 2.4% of employees participated in FWAs before COVID-19. While existing literature supports the notion of a different workplace model triggered by COVID-19.

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated a new workplace model. Galanti et al. (2021) noted that approximately 50% of employees began working from home shortly after the onset of COVID-19. A new workplace model recognized by O'Rourke (2021) identified that the forced new ways of working and doing business would be the drivers of a new workplace model. Studies like Sull et al. (2022) showed that FWAs could predict employee retention; employees may choose to leave their positions because they perceive traditional work practices as being unaccommodating. To retain employees, post-COVID-19, leaders may need to adopt McGregor's theory y view of the nature of people at work by acknowledging and accepting a new workplace and employees' preference for FWAs.

Leaders who hold the theory y view of the nature of people at work may find success in retaining employees post-COVID-19. McGregor (1960) suggested that theory

y is the belief that people enjoy work, are responsible, and significantly contribute to the organization. A leader who believes an employee generally strives to do their best will likely take a participative approach to leadership (Kanwal et al., 2019). Leaders who acknowledge and accept the evolution of the workplace and can transition from a theory x to a theory y view of the nature of people at work are likely to be open to accommodating employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19, thereby retaining employees post-COVID-19.

Theme 2: Communication

The second theme that emerged from the research participants' responses was communication. Each of the five participants shared their interpretation of communication as a strategy to retain employees who want to participate in FWAs post-COVID-19. Two subthemes materialized related to communication: frequency of communication and purposeful communication. Table 3 summarizes the number of times participants mentioned communication as a strategy to retain employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19.

Table 3

Participants' References to Communication

Participant	No. of references	%
L1	20	41
L2	10	20
L3	6	12
L4	5	11
L5	8	16
Total	49	100

Frequency of Communication

The frequency of communication was an item of interest for each participant. L1 conducted team meetings three times per week, and L2 held team meetings weekly. L1, L2, and L4 held one-on-one meetings weekly. L3 and L5 stated that they conducted regularly scheduled meetings. The content from the documents written by the organization's executive about the future of the workplace did not specify the frequency of individual meetings but discussed the frequency of group meetings, such as regularly scheduled companywide retreats.

All the participants identified consistency and avoiding rescheduling meetings as critical components to successful communication in FWAs. L2 expressed that leaders should avoid rescheduling meetings to show the employee their time is significant and ensure everything runs smoothly with the meetings. L4 agreed that leaders should minimize rescheduling the meeting for the same reason as L2. The leaders and executives identified ways to facilitate purposeful communication as a factor in successful communication.

Purposeful Communication

The participants identified purposeful communication as a necessary component of their strategy to retain employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19. L1 began by asking employees to define FWAs; then, L1 provided their definition of FWAs. All the participants found that employees defined FWAs as achieving work-life balance. Consistent with the leaders, the executives who shaped the organization's workplace stated, "Employees desire work-life balance." L1 indicated that employees have the

latitude to set their schedule, for example, to take and pick up children from school or go to the doctor and return to work quickly. In D1, the executive defined flexibility as where and when employees work that affords the employee autonomy over their time. L3 described FWAs as options for employees to accommodate life while accomplishing work. The participants found that having a conversation about what FWAs means to the employee began building the leader and employee relationship.

Leaders build relationships by talking to employees about work and dedicating time to socializing. L2 commented that time spent with an employee does not always have to be about work; socializing is as important. All the participants agreed that talking with the employees about what drives their life outside work is valuable. L4 specifically stated, "Talk about work and socialize." When leaders understand employees' lives inside and outside of work, they can increase their awareness of the employee's needs. L1 and L3 commented that it’s necessary to "get to know the employee's needs" and the accommodations the employee may require. L5 stated, "Leaders should get to know the employee to support them effectively." L5 further added that getting to know the employee gives insight into possible interruptions the employee may encounter when participating in FWAs.

The leader's ability to establish expectations is critical to the communication strategy. L1 expressed that the weekly meeting is when leaders cover and agree upon expectations. L2 further added that there should be a plan and a weekly review of the results of meeting the expectations. L3 confirmed L1 and L2's claims by stating that leaders should immediately set standards and clear expectations. L2 added that

"Expectations should align with the employee's circumstances." Thus, leaders recognizing that circumstances could impact employee performance add to the relationship between leader and employee. The leaders identified communicating performance as a natural progression following setting expectations.

The leaders and executives agreed that communicating with the employee about their performance is a way to achieve success in FWAs. All the leaders identified the need to discuss performance or how well the employee meets their key performance indicators. In D1, the executive expressed that leaders should focus on the employee's performance. L2 stated, "Tell them what they do well, what they do not do well, and how they can improve." L3 and L4 agreed with L2 and suggested talking with the employee when they do not meet their performance goals. L5 added success happens when the leader addresses performance concerns to understand why there is an issue. Therefore, those leaders often communicate purposefully and regularly continue building leader and employee relationships. The second theme, communication, aligns with this study's conceptual framework and extant literature on building leader and employee relationships that could increase retention of an employee who wants to continue FWAs post-COVID-19.

Relevance of the Findings to the Conceptual Framework and Literature

The second theme, communication, specifically leaders' communication with employees, align with this study's conceptual framework and extant literature. The participants identified team, and one-on-one meetings, whereas the literature, generally, is about the frequency of meetings. Sull et al. (2020) found that frequent communication

was helpful with the transition to FWAs. Sull et al. further added that organizations had instituted daily or weekly update meetings to assist with engagement while working remotely. Manca (2022) supported the assertion of increasing the frequency of meetings and suggested increasing the frequency of team meetings for structure. The participant's responses to communication surrounded the idea of building leader and employee relationships through communication supported the conceptual framework.

An influential leader likely holds McGregor's (1960) theory y assumption and may find it less challenging to establish leader and employee relationships that could lead to purposeful communication and impact a leader's willingness to support employee participation in FWAs. Kanwal et al. (2019) studied the results of positive and negative leadership behaviors. Kanwal et al.'s findings are consistent with McGregor's assumption that a leader who believes employees need direction will generally take a traditional approach to leadership. Kanwal et al. further added that a leader who believes an employee generally strives to do their best would likely take a practical approach to leadership. Thus, purposeful communication could lead to positive leader behaviors and a willingness to support employee participation in FWAs.

Leaders who embrace the importance of leaders and employee relationships are likely to engage in purposeful communication. In addition, theorists identified relationships as a factor in employee retention. Comparable to McGregor (1960), Herzberg (1965) commented that relationships give meaning to work. Supporting McGregor and Herzberg's claims is Maslow (1943), who affirmed the human desire to belong and form relationships. Ouchi (1981) further added that employees might only

remain with an organization with positive relational support. Augmenting McGregor's assumptions, Simon (1945) held that the leader and employee relationship are an exchange process where both should contribute equally to the relationship. Homans (1958) suggested that leader and employee contributions to the relationship could facilitate communication. A move toward a participative leadership approach might accelerate the leader and employee relationship that could impact communication, thereby creating the possibility of triggering an evolution that would encourage FWAs.

Theme 3: Collaboration

The third theme that emerged from the research participants' responses was collaboration. Each of the five participants shared their interpretation of collaboration as a strategy to retain employees who wanted to participate in FWAs post-COVID-19. Two subthemes materialized related to collaboration: connection and trust. Table 4 summarizes the number of times participants mentioned collaboration as a strategy to retain employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19.

Table 4

Participants' References to Collaboration

Participant	No. of references	%
L1	17	47
L2	9	25
L3	1	3
L4	3	8
L5	6	17
Total	36	100

Leaders willing to collaborate by contributing to the relationship could advance the leader and employee relationship. L1 suggested leaders exhibit investment in the

relationship by contributing to ensure the employee is pleased in their role and when they are not assisting them in finding a role where they are content. All the leaders expressed that employees feel they are valuable when the leader contributes to the relationship by understanding and making every effort to accommodate their needs and follow through. The executives who wrote about the organization's future of the workplace affirmed that a leader should invest by accommodating the employee's need for FWAs. In D1, the executive stated, "The employee may feel invested in their job when they can fit their schedule to their lifestyle." L5 found that collaboration is an investment by the leader and employee. Thus, a leader willing to invest in the relationship by collaborating could successfully retain employees post-COVID-19. The leaders who invest in the relationship are likely to form connections with the employee.

Connection

The leaders expressed that working together heightened the leader and employee connection. L2 assisted employees in establishing a suitable connection to obtain help when needed. L2 and L5 suggested that leaders who spend time with the employees form connections, and employees feel like "They have a place where they belong." The leaders found they might need to be creative to assist in establishing connections in FWAs.

Creative ways to establish connections were an item of interest to all five participants. L1 and L2 utilized outside companies that specialize in virtual team events. L1 sponsored a smores team event "Everyone received a box of smores ingredients; over a Zoom call, we shared the smores, recognized employees, and socialized." L2 sponsored a virtual panic room event, a social event where the participants solved riddles to break

out of a virtual room. The participants agreed that employees feel like they belong when they find ways to connect, which increases retention. Notably, the participants and the organization's executives who wrote about the future of the workplace agreed that connections could lead to trust.

Trust

The participants identified establishing trust as a component of retaining an employee who wants to continue FWAs post-COVID-19. L1 and L2 suggested that when employees trust the leader, this could indicate that the leader is contributing to the relationship. L1 added that the organizations conducted a companywide survey asking employees about their trust in leadership; the result of L1 employee responses was that they trust their leader, which they attribute to their high employee retention. L2 stated, "A leader can gain an employee’s trust by contributing to the relationship." L2, L3, and L4 contended that doing what you say you are going to do is a factor in employees trusting leaders. L5 suggested that an indicator of success is employee trust. The authors of D1 and D2 confirmed that employees who trust leaders are likely to feel comfortable talking about everything with the leader. All the participants agreed that building the leader and employee relationship through collaboration is the way to establish connections and trust.

Relevance of the Findings to the Conceptual Framework and Literature

The third theme, collaboration, aligns with this study's conceptual framework and extant literature. The participant's responses identified that the leader's ability to collaborate could result in connections and trust that further solidified the leader and employee relationships. Kremer et al. (2019) suggested that participative leaders may be

more willing to collaborate, consistent with leaders who aspire to McGregor's (1960) theory y influential leaders. Moswela and Kgosidialwa (2019) asserted that supportive leaders are approachable, which could lead to collaboration. Subsequently, leaders who contribute or invest in the relationship likely strengthen the collaboration between leaders and employees.

When the leader and employee collaborate, there is likely consideration of the contribution or investment offered to the relationship. Barnard (1938) and Simon (1945) contended that leaders motivate employees to contribute to collaboration. Chen and Sriphon (2021) supported Barnard's and Simon's contention by stating that when one person contributes to a relationship, there is an expectation of a return contribution to said relationship. Homans (1958) is consistent with Simon's (1945) organizational equilibrium theory in that there is a likelihood of exchange between parties in a relationship. Thus, collaboration could be a function of the leader's influence that contributes to the relationship that could build connections.

An influential leader who is participative and supportive might readily contribute to the collaboration facilitating the possibility of forming connections. People's basic needs are forming connections, belonging, and finding a place within a group (Maslow, 1943). Employees are more likely to remain with an organization when they connect with leaders and other employees. McGregor (1960) found that employees desire connections in the workplace. Consistent with Ouchi (1981), who found that employees frequently want to connect with their leader. Byrd (2022) suggested that connections at work give meaning to the employee's work; likewise, McGregor and Herzberg (1965) contended

that interactions give meaning to work. Connecting and interacting could aid in forming unique relationships between leaders and employees (Lee et al., 2019). Thus, a leader who collaborates by contributing to the leader and employee relationship could build trust.

A leader who trusts their employees to perform their work, could impact their willingness to support employee participation in FWAs. Mysirlaki and Paraskeva, 2020 found that in work environments like FWAs, the leader's effectiveness could relate to trust, consistent with Chen and Sriphon's (2021) observation that the investment in the relationship could also be dependent on trust. Homans's (1958) social exchange theory could assist leaders in developing strategies to succeed in FWAs by building relationships that could lead to trust. McGregor (1960) asserted that leaders should trust employees to facilitate building leader and employee relationships. Thereby, trust could result from collaboration and connections that inspire the leader and employee relationship.

Document Analysis and Triangulation of Data Sources

The data collected from conducting semistructured interviews, participants' disclosure about employee retention, and documents from the website about FWAs assisted in confirming the consistency of the data by utilizing methodological triangulation of the data sources. Campbell et al. (2022) implied that methodological triangulation could assist with analyzing the data and interpreting the findings. After analyzing the transcripts of the interviews and reviewing all the documents, I determined consistency with the data sources and the alignment of the data collection findings in supporting the interviewees' responses. The disclosures offered by the participants and

documents obtained from the website provided additional confirmation and consistency with the description in answering the research question. Through analyzing the data, three themes emerged: acknowledgment and acceptance, communication, and collaboration. An effective business practice could be for leaders to understand employees' lives inside and outside work to accommodate the employee's FWAs needs.

Applications to Professional Practice

The COVID-19 pandemic has uncovered new challenges leaders face with retaining employees post-COVID-19. For example, employees are demanding that leaders accommodate their FWAs needs. Up to 90% of employees stated that they wish to continue FWAs post-COVID-19 (Green et al., 2020). The employee's desire for FWAs highlights the need for first-line leaders to develop strategies to retain employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19 to remain competitive. This study's findings are relevant to developing first-line leaders' strategies to retain employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19.

This study may provide insights for leaders seeking to implement new strategies that could increase the retention of an employee who wants to continue FWAs post-COVID-19. The results of this study will be published in ProQuest so that future research and future leaders may implement the strategies the participants used in their business practices to retain employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19. The interviewed first-line leaders identified the importance of acknowledgment and acceptance, communication, and collaboration to increase the likelihood of retaining an employee who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19.

The initial recommendation is for first-line leaders to acknowledge that FWAs are possibly here to stay and that work arrangements may not return to the traditional work environment. Next, leaders should accept the shift in leadership practices from monitoring hours worked to setting performance expectations. The shift is comparable to leadership practices consistent with an influential leader instead of an authoritative leader. When leaders make the mindset shift, they can understand the employee needs for FWAs through frequent purposeful communication. For example, leaders could ask employees their definition of FWAs and prioritize their FWAs needs. The leader could also ascertain what it is in the employee's life that perpetrates the need for FWAs. Understanding the employee's needs could facilitate the leader's willingness to collaborate with the employee by contributing to the relationship to understand and work together to satisfy the employee's FWA needs. Thus, the findings from this study could help other first-line leaders to formulate strategies to retain an employee who wants to continue FWAs post-COVID-19 that are conducive to their business practices.

Implications for Social Change

The results from this study may contribute to a positive social change in terms of actual improvements to individuals, communities, organizations, and societies, specifically, the environment, the availability of jobs, and the economy. To heighten the awareness of reducing pollution, the intent of the 1996 Clean Air Act was to encourage less traffic by supporting telework arrangements (Currie & Walker, 2019). The assertion of Currie and Walker (2019) is consistent with Soga et al. (2022), who found that decreased commuter activity could potentially decrease air pollution and traffic

congestion. Instituting FWAs could contribute to the long-term solution of environmental problems (Loia & Adinolfi, 2021). Thus, FWAs could produce a positive impact on the environment by decreasing pollution along with a positive impact on job availability.

Studies like this could have a social impact by increasing an organization's ability to attract and retain employees who need FWAs. Using remote work to take advantage of talent acquisition reduces geographical challenges and becomes a significant driver to maximizing FWAs (Soroui, 2021). According to Travis (2021), maximizing FWAs could increase work opportunities for employees with disabilities. A leader's willingness to support FWAs could attract and retain those who would otherwise not enter the workforce, like women and elderly workers, because of the need or preference for flexibility (Ray & Pana-Cryan, 2021). In this sense, the study may have implications concerning equity issues and access to professional employment spaces.

The ability to afford opportunities for employees to enter and remain in the workforce could impact the economy. Employees may have the opportunity to secure higher-paying jobs outside their geographical location. Barrero et al. (2021) suggested that because employees live and work in the community, there could be a benefit to the local economy. Consistent with Barrero et al., Soroui (2021) found that remote work can strengthen employees' economic connections with their communities. Therefore, local communities may find positive social changes due to remote work.

Recommendations for Action

First-line leaders seeking strategies to retain an employee who wants to continue FWAs post-COVID-19 may find acknowledgment and acceptance, communication, and

collaboration valuable strategies in an FWA environment. Studies like Sull et al.'s (2022) showed that FWAs could predict employee retention; employees may leave their positions because they perceive traditional work practices as unaccommodating. First-line leaders could use the results from this study to understand the employee's need for FWAs to support accommodating employees who want to continue participating in FWA, which might increase the retention of those employees. The key recommendation is for business leaders to understand employees' lives inside and outside of work to accommodate the employees' priorities for FWAs.

Based on the results of this study, I propose the following recommendations for action, which may lead to successful first-line leader strategies to retain employees who want to continue participating in FWAs post-COVID-19:

1. First-line leaders at all levels could mentor each other by recognizing the evolution of the workplace and sharing strategies to ensure the continuation of FWAs for employees who need and those who prefer flexibility. At the same time, helping the organization thrive in the new workplace landscape.
2. First-line leaders should capitalize on their experience in FWAs to continue the shift to an influential leadership style to facilitate leader and employee relationships essential to successful strategies in an FWA environment.
3. First-line leaders should understand how employees define FWAs through regular, often, and purposeful communication. Building the leader and employee relationship through communication allows the employee to realize

the leader is contributing to the relationship and prompts the employee to reciprocate.

4. First-line leaders should actively pursue creative ways to establish connections with their employees. For example, use companies specializing in virtual team events for social events.
5. First-line leaders should actively pursue forming leader and employee relationships to enhance communication and collaboration, producing trust and retention.

By implementing effective strategies to accommodate employee needs for FWAs, first-line leaders can increase employee retention and attract talent to maintain the organization's competitive advantage. I intend to publish the findings from this study in various academic business journals and disseminate the results in scholarly literature, conferences, and workshops related to a human resource like the Association for Talent Development. First-line leaders should review the findings of this study and consider implementing these strategies in their organizations.

Recommendations for Further Research

As the constraints of COVID-19 subside, leaders continue to face challenges in developing strategies in the FWA environment to retain employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19. This qualitative single case study aimed to explore first-line leaders' strategies in FWAs to retain employees post-COVID-19. Recommendations include addressing the weaknesses of the study and opportunities for future research.

The primary data source for this qualitative single case study was semistructured interviews. The validity of this study relied on the participant's ability to remember the facts and events of their experiences when implementing FWA strategies. A recommendation for future research in this regard would be to conduct a study following the participants as they initially implement FWA strategies through the implementation process. Case studies that follow the implementation may reveal additional strategies, challenges, and solutions to establish valuable outcomes. Because this study was delimited to leaders with successful strategies in a single organization in the Southwest United States, future qualitative researchers should explore first-line leaders' strategies in FWAs in different geographical locations and other industry segments. For example, conducting multiple case studies inviting leaders from varying industries and geographical locations. The findings of this study indicated the need for further research.

During this study designed to explore strategies first-line leaders used in FWAs to retain employees who wanted to participate in FWAs post-COVID-19, I recognized additional opportunities for further research of this phenomenon. Future researchers could conduct research that explores the phenomenon from the employee's perspective of the success of the first-line leader's strategies in FWAs. In the future, there may be a need to study employees' needs for time away from work in an FWA environment to update the policy around paid time off. First-line leaders need to develop strategies to balance flexibility with togetherness. First-line leaders face a challenge with inclusiveness in a hybrid FWA environment, such as connecting employees at the physical location of work and those simultaneously participating in FWAs.

Reflections

As I reflect on my Doctorate in Business Administration journey, I can consider the growth in my scholarly thinking. In earning my doctoral degree, the journey has taught me to become judicious in critical thinking; my development includes viewing issues and problems in a broader sense. Specifically, I feel confident in expressing my thoughts and presenting my thinking because I have learned how to support my position with scholarly works. As I move back into a first-line leader role, I will experience the same challenges within my chosen research topic. I have gained confidence in leading, knowing I contributed to research that may result in improved business practices.

The ability of a researcher to remain free of bias during the interview process is critical. I consciously tried to refrain from personal bias or preconceived notions. I accomplished this by taking inventory of my personal beliefs as a first-line leader and using that awareness to remain neutral throughout the research process. In addition, I followed an interview protocol to ensure a consistent interview approach with the participants assisting them to freely share their ideas and opinions without interruption or manipulating the interview process in any way. I am satisfied that the interview process is free of any form of bias and that my perceptions did not steer the participant's responses or degrade the integrity of the research. The consistency in the participant responses is evident in the bias-free interview process.

After conducting a research study, I greatly appreciate the extensive work and structure needed to complete a research project. I appreciated the magnitude of ensuring adherence to reliability and validity. The lack of reliability and validity could diminish

the credibility of the piece of work and negatively influence the field of study. In the future, I look forward to using the knowledge and experiences I gained from earning my doctoral degree to continue contributing to first-line leaders' strategies in FWAs literature.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study revealed that first-line leaders who successfully foster leader and employee relationships that encourage communication and collaboration in their business practices assist in retaining employees who want to participate in FWAs. They have found an increase in employee retention by acknowledging and accepting the evolving workplace landscape that includes FWAs and adopting communication and collaboration strategies that may be different in an FWA environment than in a traditional work arrangement environment. The participants in this study offered advice for first-line leaders to develop strategies consistent with that of an influential leader. According to these participants, a successful first-line leader must continue to build the leader and employee relationship to understand the employees' lives inside and outside of work to accommodate the employees' priorities for FWAs because of the competition to attract and retain talent. This research can be helpful to first-line leaders who are looking to develop strategies to retain employees who want to continue participating in FWAs post-COVID-19 and expand their business practices in the FWA environment.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Interview Protocol</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Specific Business Problem

The specific business problem is that some first-line leaders in the Southwest United States lack strategies for retaining employees who want to continue flexible work arrangements (FWAs) post-COVID-19.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Research Question

What strategies do some first-line leaders in the Southwest United States use to retain employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Participant Criteria

The criteria for the participants are leaders who have successful strategies for leading employees who participate in FWAs in the Southwest United States. The plan to gain access to the participants is to use my professional networks to include fellow students in educational programs, colleagues, and professional organizations, i.e., Association for Talent Development (ATD) to identify participants who meet the criteria and make initial contact via email to request consent to interview.</td></tr>
<tr><td>What you will do

This column contains what I will be doing in addition to asking the interview questions.</td><td>What you will say—script

This column contains what I will say to the participant as I proceed through the interview. Note—that I will add probing questions as appropriate.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Introduce the interview and set the stage—over a coffee</td><td>Script

To start, I would like to thank you for taking the time to meet for this interview. I am a doctoral student who is in the process of writing my doctoral study. I have asked you for the interview to gather data for a research project on leader’s strategies to retain employees who want to continue in FWAs post-COVID-19. The need for organizations to offer FWAs is a topic of conversation due to the recent global pandemic. At this time, I would like to reiterate that what you say in this interview will not be attributed to you without first obtaining your written permission. In addition, you have the right at any time not to answer a question you do not feel comfortable answering. Also, it is your right to stop the</td></tr>
</table>

	interview at any time you wish to end. Your answers to the questions will assist in identifying leadership strategies for retaining employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19. If you would like, when the interviews conclude in approximately two months, I can forward a summary of the findings. To ensure the accuracy of the interview, would you consent to my video and audio recording the interview? Before we go any further with the interview questions about leadership strategies for retaining employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19, do you still consent to the interview?
Reminders of what I will do during the interview. • Watch for nonverbal cues • Paraphrase as needed • Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in-depth data. • Remember that qualitative researchers need deep and rich data. A one sentence short answer to the interview question may provide superficial data at best.	1. Interview question What strategies have you used to retain employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19?
	2. Interview question How did you measure the effectiveness of your strategies to retain employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19?
	3. Interview question What strategies did you find that worked best to retain employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19?
	4. Interview question What key challenges to implementing the successful strategies did you encounter?
	5. Interview question How did you address the key challenges to implementing the successful strategies for retaining employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19?
	6. Interview question What additional information can you share about the strategies you used to retain employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19?

• Again, probe, probe, probe. Metaphorically dig deep for rich data.	
Wrap up interview thanking participant	Script The 60 minutes we set aside for this interview is quickly approaching. Thank you for your time in answering the series of questions to help me gain insight into leader's strategies for employees who want to continue FWAs post-COVID-19. Before the interview closes, is there any question you would like to ask or comments you would like to share?
Schedule follow-up member checking interview	Script If there are no other questions or comments, I would like to ask if you would be willing to agree to a follow-up interview in two weeks? The follow-up interview will allow me to cover further questions that arise after reviewing the initial meeting. Again, thank you for your time; your input is invaluable to this study.