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Retention Strategies for Call Center Representatives in the U.S. Airline Industry

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University
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Abstract

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by

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MBA, University of Phoenix, 2008

BBA, Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, 2000

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Voluntary turnover of call center employees threatens productivity, service levels, the customer experience, and the financial stability of businesses. Airline business call center leaders should be concerned about the time, stress, and cost of hiring and training new employees and the negative impact on business outcomes. Grounded in Mitchell's job embeddedness theory, the purpose of this qualitative single-case study was to explore strategies airline business call center leaders use to reduce voluntary turnover among customer service representatives. The participants were five leaders in an airline business call center located in Houston, Texas. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and a review of organization documents. Through thematic, analysis, five themes emerged: (a) optimal employee-organizational job fit, (b) opportunities for upward and lateral mobility, (c) leadership support for employee engagement, (d) individualized personal and professional communication, and (e) flexibility to accommodate work-life balance. A key recommendation is for airline call center business leaders to pay more attention to the health and well-being of employees. The implications for positive social change include the potential for successful change initiatives that impact employee satisfaction and economic health for the airline industry and its' customers.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my father, who raised me, Henry Holmes. When I was a child, you encouraged me to pursue education. I did not know the importance of goal setting, but you set the first one in my life, and I know you were satisfied with an associate degree, but you taught me to aim higher and do my best. You are my inspiration. This accomplishment is in honor of your legacy. The goal of obtaining the highest degree has been because of you, Daddy. Thank you.

Acknowledgments

I would first thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Thank you for answering my prayers. I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me (Phillippians 4:13). I am very grateful for my chair, Dr. Frank Bearden. Thank you for your patience, advice, and feedback. Thank you for pushing me to “cross the finish line.” I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. John Bryan and Dr. Marilyn Simon. Your guidance and feedback were greatly appreciated. Lastly, I would like to thank my children, Grace and Jeremiah. I hope I have inspired you to overcome every obstacle to achieve your dreams.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

High employee turnover affects a company's capital resources, expenditures, and public image (Al-Suraihi et al., 2021). Staff turnover leads to dysfunctional costs that diminish profitability through lost productivity and increased costs associated with the separation, recruitment, hiring, and training of new hires (Kang et al., 2018). In addition, employee turnover weakens the competitive advantage, productivity, and stability of the organization (Wine et al., 2020). If other job opportunities are plentiful, employee loyalties may fall, and an organization's retention strategies may not be enough to retain employees (Feyerabend et al., 2018). These challenges have affected the air travel industry and have led to the recognition of an ongoing need to study and understand successful retention strategies among airline businesses (Kampitak & Yoopetch, 2018). I conducted this study to address strategies for reducing employee turnover in the sector. Section 1 includes background information on this problem and the purpose of this study. The section includes the research question, nature, and significance of the study. Descriptions of the conceptual framework, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations and definitions of key terms provide context for this qualitative single-case study.

Background of the Problem

Employee turnover creates sizable losses in business organizations (Ju & Ji, 2019). Intangible and tangible investment losses include time spent on hiring, training, and orienting new employees; reduced productivity, competitiveness, and profitability; decreased employee knowledge and experience levels; decreased employee morale; and lower quality of customer service (Dwesini, 2019; Holston-Okae & Mushi, 2018; Ju &

Li, 2019). High employee attrition or the abrupt exit of highly valued employees is problematic (Bake, 2019). In March 2017, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that 5.3 million employees voluntarily left their jobs. Customer service personnel turnover costs are 5 times an employee's annual salary (Goodman & Broetzmann, 2019).

To stay competitive and profitable, business leaders need to reduce employee voluntary turnover (Holston-Okae & Mushi, 2018). High employee turnover correlates with business financial distress (Holston-Okae & Mushi, 2018). Reducing employee turnover reduces costs associated with recruiting, training, and initiating new employees (Bake, 2019). Cost reductions increase profits. In the airline industry, there has been a struggle to increase employee retention in general (Kampitak & Yoopetch, 2018). Call center leaders must implement effective retention strategies to contribute to longevity in human resources for an increase in performance, profits, and competition (Dwesini, 2019). In this study, I sought to identify successful specific retention strategies that could be used within airline business call centers. The results could yield strategies that could help to alleviate call center employee turnover, if implemented.

Problem and Purpose

High employee turnover rates stunt organizational growth and increase operating costs (Alhmoud & Rjoub, 2020). High operating costs may result from customer service call center representatives voluntarily or involuntarily leaving their positions. In emerging countries, among employees with less than 1 year of tenure, the attrition rate among call center representatives exceeds 40% whereas in industrialized countries, it exceeds 27% (Valle et al., 2017). Within six months of employment, approximately 35%

of call center representatives quit their jobs, and within 16 months of employment, the turnover rate continues to increase (Schick, 2020). The general problem was that employee turnover can negatively affect a company’s financial performance. The specific business problem was that some call center leaders lack successful retention strategies to alleviate voluntary turnover among customer service representatives.

The purpose of this qualitative single-case study was to explore how airline business call center leaders use retention strategies to successfully alleviate voluntary turnover among customer service representatives. The targeted population included call center leaders in an airline business call center located in the U.S. state of Texas who had implemented retention strategies that were successful in reducing call center voluntary turnover among customer service representatives. This population was appropriate for this study because 75% of attrition in call centers occur within the first month of employment and call centers are notorious for high attrition rates (Valle & Ruiz, 2015). Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic increased job insecurity across almost all industries and sectors, as perceptions of job insecurity increased turnover intent, with a higher negative impact among Generation Y workers (Jung et al., 2021).

The potential implications for positive social change include improved retention strategies; opportunities for promoting from within organizations; and increased employee morale, job security, value, and self-esteem. The culture of the organization may improve due to lower voluntary turnover, increases in the quality of customer service provided, improvement in training and development, and an increase of employees participating in social events. Successful business applications of recommendations from this study may include improved operations, optimized productivity, improved work conditions, organizational growth, competitive advantages, increased profits, increased employment opportunities, decreased unemployment rate, stabilization of the workforce, and enhanced customer service, which may strengthen the local communities and promote a positive image towards the customers and employees.

Nature of the Study

I used a qualitative method to explore call center leaders' reflections and experiences related to employee retention. The use of qualitative methodology can lead to new insights and reveal social complexity, through its flexibility and the ability to explore the problem thoroughly (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). Qualitative research can result in a thorough study of the phenomena (Lemon & Hayes 2020) although it is subjective to the researcher and participants (Tomaszewski, 2018). A quantitative approach was not appropriate because my research approach did not include numerical data, statistical analysis, or examination of known variables, which according to Rutberg and Bouikidis (2018) are characteristics of quantitative methodology. A mixed-methods approach, which combines both qualitative and quantitative data (Sahin & Ozturk, 2019), was not applicable because it would have necessitated inclusion of numerical data to examine the relationships among study variables, which was not necessary to answer the research question. I did not require statistical analysis or an examination of variables to answer the research question. Thus, I did not use a quantitative or mixed-method approach.

I chose a single-case study design. The researcher can explore in-depth comprehension and the complexity of the phenomenon in case studies (Tobi & Kampen, 2018). A case study allows descriptive, exploratory, or explanatory research on an unknown development (Casula et al., 2020). A case study design features an organized approach and a practice-oriented theory (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Due to time constraints and the focus of this study, I concluded that the phenomenological and ethnography designs were not the best qualitative designs. A phenomenological researcher concentrates on a particular group's lived human experiences and the essence of the meaning of experiences (Martiny et al., 2021). The emphasis of this study was on the retention strategies used by participants and not just their experiences of the phenomenon. Researchers using the ethnography design focus on people, their culture, and shared beliefs (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). The ethnography design was inappropriate because I did not focus on people's culture or shared beliefs. A case study design was the best one, I concluded, for examining the study phenomenon in depth.

Research Question

I sought to answer the following research question: What retention strategies do call center leaders use to alleviate voluntary turnover among customer service representatives?

Interview Questions

1. What are some of the aspects of the job that contribute to customer service representative voluntary turnover?
2. What strategies are you using to alleviate call center customer service representative voluntary turnover?

3. What strategies did you find worked best to reduce your customer service representative voluntary turnover?
4. What strategies did you find worked least to reduce customer service representative voluntary turnover?
5. How did your customer service representatives respond to your different retention strategies?
6. How did you assess the success of your retention strategies?
7. What else would you like to share about the call center leaders' retention strategies?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework chosen was job embeddedness. Mitchell et al. (2001) developed the job embeddedness framework. The job embeddedness theory focuses on issues beyond satisfaction and dissatisfaction with one's job and offers explanations of how rooted an employee is on- and off-the-job; according to the theory, this rootedness affects one's decision to stay with their current employer (Mitchell et al., 2001). Mitchell et al. identified three key constructs: (a) links, (b) fit, and (c) sacrifice. I expected that the described retention strategies could be explained in terms of the key constructs of this theory.

Job embeddedness is derived from Granovetter's (1985) social embeddedness theory, which emerged from the researcher's study of social networks and economic outcomes. The social network and economic outcomes are based upon norms and network density, the strength of work ties, and economic and noneconomic factors (Granovetter, 1985). With the introduction of the job embeddedness theory, Mitchell et al. (2001) replaced the precursor concepts of Granovetter: Fit replaced norms and network density, links replaced the strength of work ties, and sacrifice replaced the interpenetration of economic and noneconomic factors.

As applied in research, job embeddedness revolves around how embedded the employees are within their organization and community. Job embeddedness theory advances the idea that an employee stays with an organization because of different stimuli (Porter et al., 2019). Stimuli include interpersonal relationships with coworkers at and outside of the workplace, their compatibility with the job, and job skills (Mitchell et al., 2001). On-the-job stimuli are more beneficial to the company because of the direct ties to the company, unlike off-the-job stimuli which may represent reasons for turnover (Porter et al., 2019). In conducting this study, I expected that the retention strategies described by participants could be explained in terms of these key constructs of the job embeddedness theory.

Operational Definitions

Fit: An employee’s apparent congeniality within an organization and their habitat. (Shah et al., 2020).

Job embeddedness: A wide-range of factors that effects individual employee retention with a company (Shah et al., 2020).

Links: Formal or informal connections between an employee and institutions or people (Shah et al., 2020).

Sacrifice: The perceived cost of material or psychological benefits that are forfeited by an employee's department from an organization (Shah et al., 2020).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

The following subsections include the explanations of the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the research. Assumptions are beliefs that particular conditions of the research exist or are true without factual verification (Poodry & Asai, 2018). Limitations are conditions of the research that are outside of the researcher's control that may affect the results and conclusions drawn from the research (Ross et al., 2019). Delimitations are the boundaries for the study, determined by the researcher, which narrow the scope of the study (Page et al., 2018).

Assumptions

Assumptions are beliefs that the information or conditions are true without verification (Poodry & Asai, 2018). My first assumption was that the interviewees would provide honest answers. My second assumption was that the interviewees were familiar with the successful retention strategies used in the company and could describe those strategies in interviews. My third assumption was the interviewees used the retention strategies they described to successfully reduce voluntary turnover. My fourth assumption was that at least the minimum number of call center leaders needed for data saturation would have time to conduct the interviews and would sign the informed consent, contribute related documents, and answer the interview questions as completely as possible.

Limitations

Limitations are restrictions with respect to the research design, which are outside of the researcher's control; limitations may affect the outcomes and conclusions drawn from the research (Ross et al., 2019). This single-case study was limited to only one call center in Texas; therefore, results do not represent all call center retention strategies in other industries or locations. I only interviewed the leaders about the retention strategies without additional input from frontline employees.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the boundaries of the research set by the researcher (Page et al., 2018). The first delimitation is that the research involved the perspectives of only the leaders in an airline call center. I did not include other types of call centers or employees in the study. The second delimitation was that I targeted only an airline call center in Texas. The results may not be transferable to other types of call centers or industries outside of the geographical area. The third delimitation was the sample size of five leaders in the call center, which was expected to lead to data saturation.

Significance of the Study

I undertook this study to identify strategies for reducing voluntary employee turnover in airline business call centers. Specifically, I sought to generate data that might lead to recommendations for recruiters, managers, and leadership to develop more effective retention strategies in the airline industry. Companies experience harm when they are unable to attract and keep valuable employees (Al-Suraihi et al., 2021). Research has shown that long-term productive employees increase a company's profitability (Wine et al., 2020). Effective retention strategies can reduce the promotional costs of hiring and training of new employees and increase productive employees (Al-Suraihi et al., 2021). Effective retention strategies may increase employee satisfaction and contribute to profitability (Wine et al., 2020). The results of this study revealed strategies that, if implemented, could help improve human resources and practices. The improved retention of employees in the workforce may result in greater contributions to leadership, teamwork, and core values that can benefit the business, contribute to a more stable economy, and improve consumer experiences.

The results may contribute to positive social change by identifying strategies for increasing job stability. Employees could have more stable roles in their businesses and communities and feel more empowered. By understanding ways to implement or improve employee retention strategies, business leaders could help to reduce economic hardships that the unemployed may face. Successes in retaining employees could thereby help to reduce unemployment costs while also reducing the costs of doing business for owners—costs that might otherwise become burdens to consumers and society in general. Employee retention is likely to help reduce the costs of doing business, curb higher inflation and unemployment, and cultivate a more highly experienced and skilled workforce to better serve the needs of society (Khalid & Nawab, 2018). The study therefore has broad-ranging implications for positive social change.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

This section is a review of the related professional and academic literature. In conducting this literature review, I discovered existing published research related to the study topic and clarified the gap in the body of knowledge pertaining to the topic of this study. The organization of the literature review consists of subsections devoted to (a) the literature search strategy; (b) a critical analysis and synthesis of the literature; (c) the application to the applied business problem, including retention challenges; (d) reasons for turnover; (e) analysis of the conceptual framework; (f) supporting and contrasting theories; and (g) retention strategies, employee turnover, and turnover theories.

Literature Search Strategy

Initially, I sought to discover reasons for employee turnover in the hospitality industry; eventually, I narrowed the scope of the study to the U.S. call center industry I researched reasons why employees leave organizations and reasons people continue to stay when dissatisfied with their employer. I researched different theories and identified the job embeddedness theory by Mitchell et al. (2001) as a suitable lens for the study of employee retention. I expanded the review by exploring contradictory findings, hypotheses, and alternative theories to job embeddedness.

I searched Walden University library databases and the Google Scholar search engine to find resources for the literature review. I focused on literature published between 2017 and 2022. In my database and search engine queries, I used keywords such as *attrition*, *call centers*, *call center turnover*, *hospitality industry*, *job attachment*, *job embeddedness*, *retention*, *retention strategies*, and *turnover*. The databases used for literature sources included the following: Academic Search Complete, Directory of Open Access Journal, EBSCOhost, Emerald Insight, ERIC, Expanded Academic ASAP, Medline, ScienceDirect, Science Citation Index, ProQuest, PsychArticles, and Sage. I utilized Ulrich’s Periodical Directory to verify peer-reviewed articles.

Critical Analysis and Synthesis of the Literature

In this qualitative single-case study, I explored retention strategies to help alleviate voluntary turnover. The search results were from several peer-reviewed sources. These were *Academy of Management Journal*, *American Psychological Association*, *Applied Artificial Intelligence*, *Applied Soft Computing*, *Global Business and Management Research: An International Journal*, *Human Resources Management Journal*, *International Business Review*, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *International Journal of Market Research*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Journal of Business & Psychology*, *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism*, *Journal of Management Development*, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *Journal of Professional Nursing*, *Journal of Transnational Management*, *Management Science Letters*, *Organizational Development Journal*, *Organizational Dynamics*, *Personnel Review*, *Qualitative Health Research*, *Radiologic Technology*, *Pakistan Journal of Commerce and Social Sciences*, *Personnel Review*, *Public Library of Science*, *SCMS Journal of Indian Management*, *Social Behavior and Personality*, *Society of Occupational Medicine*, *Sona Global Management Review*, *Sustainability*, *Systems Research and Behavioral Science*, *The Psychologist-Manager Journal*, and *Tourism Review*.

In addition to researching peer-reviewed articles, I accessed government publications and germinal books. The germinal books were about case study research and strategic customer service. The government resources from the Bureau of Labor Statistics led to the identification of descriptive statistical information about employee turnover in the U.S. economic and workplace sectors. The doctoral study includes 123 sources, of which more than 90% were peer-reviewed sources; 114 references had publication dates between 2018 and 2022. The remaining sources were books and government resources that were published prior to 2018; the majority of these sources were germinal publications pertaining to the origins of theories in the study's conceptual framework. Accordingly, 93% of the peer-reviewed references were published during the 5 years between 2018 and 2022. Table 1 includes the frequency counts of the references discussed in this section.

Table 1

Frequency and Percentage of the Literature Sources

Resources	Within 5 years	Older than 5 years	Total	% within 5 years
Books	1	1	2	50
Dissertations	0	0	0	
Peer-reviewed articles	112	8	120	93
Government documents	1	0	1	100
Other resources	0	0	0	
Total	114	9	123	

Application to the Applied Business Problem

The purpose of this qualitative single-case study was to explore how airline business call center leaders use retention strategies to successfully alleviate voluntary turnover among customer service representatives. The research population included call center leaders in one Texas airline call center who had implemented retention strategies that were successful in reducing turnover among call center customer service representatives. The implications for positive social change include (a) improved retention strategies, (b) potential for promoting from within the organization, (c) sustain organizational profitability; (d) increased employee morale, job security, value and self-esteem of individuals.

Employee turnover is costly in any business organization (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018). Historically, low-paying jobs have been in the hospitality industry (Mensah et al., 2020) which includes the call center industry. Turnover in the industry is unavoidable and hard to manage (Dwesini, 2019). Call center turnover rates vary from 25% to 39% in emerging countries to 4% to 13% in industrialized countries (Valle et al. 2017). Higher turnover rates are most prevalent among call center representative employees with less than 1 year of employment (Valle et al., 2017). Employee turnover is problematic in call centers because it negatively affects employee morale and productivity (Bake 2019; Dwesini, 2019). Employee turnover causes fatigue and frustration (Valle et al., 2017).

The interaction between call center representatives and management is minimal because representatives spend most of their time interacting with customers over the telephone. Call center representatives work in a highly managed work and controlled environment (Valle et al., 2017; Zito et al., 2018). Their job is repetitive and constantly monitored via recorded calls, timed breaks, allotted call time per phone call, and unauthorized time not connected to live calls (Zito et al., 2018; Valle et al., 2017). The micromanagement that they experience can lead to mistrust and increase their stress level, undermining the building of rapport (Kerasidou & Kingori, 2019).

The call center representative may not feel trusted to do their work because of the constant monitoring; additionally, they may be less likely to engage with their immediate supervisor. Poor engagement is another challenge in this industry. The call center representative is the first contact with customers and is the voice and ears of the company (Feyerabend et al., 2018). The immediate supervisor represents the company. As an internal customer, the call center employee needs a sense of being valued, listened to, appreciated (Bake, 2019) and belonging to the company (Zito et al., 2018).

A call center representative's profession is challenging because many do not see the job as a career, but as a transitional position until something more suitable is available (Feyeraband, 2018; Zito et al., 2018). Minimum wage, no career opportunities, and repetitious and tedious tasks are usually associated with call center representative positions (Feyerabend et al., 2018; Zito et al., 2018). Many of the call center agents have college degrees and are loyal to their job but not to companies (Feyerabend et al., 2018). Therefore, job hopping for the same position in different companies is common and makes it more challenging to keep an employee with the same company long term. However, millennials are beneficial for companies because they are typically techno savvy, adept, swift, and proficient (Jain & Dutta, 2019). Additionally, employers need to replace employees due to retirement (Bake, 2019). Hence, business leaders need to know how to attract and retain suitable potential employees if they want their organizations to stay competitive.

Company leaders need to know their external customers and their internal customers: their employees. The relationship between the employee and first line of management is important for development and company growth. Every generation is different, and some factors to consider are having an appropriate mentoring program, employee development, and working environment, as these are crucial to retaining valuable employees (Alhmoud & Rjoub, 2020). As an employee's autonomy increases, long-term career options increase within the organization (Zito et al., 2018).

Reasons for Employee Turnover in the Call Center Industry

The work environment itself is reason for voluntary turnover in call centers because it is stressful and wrought with complaints and timed interactions on monitored phone calls throughout the day (Posey, 2019). Leadership is the connection between the employee and the organization's culture. Bake (2019) noted that poor leadership is a primary reason why employees leave an organization. The following subsections include peer-reviewed findings pertaining to these primary reasons for employee turnover in in the call center industry.

Work Environment

The call center environment features constant aggression and refutation (Feyeraband, 2018). The frontline employee in the call center repeatedly interacts with customers, receives information from them, and often fields their inquiries and complaints (Posey, 2019). Frequently, interaction between the customer service representative and customers is unfriendly, as customers may express their situation with hostility and negative emotions (Feyeraband, 2018). Thus, the call center representative must deal with stress, hinderance, and emotional burnout (Gonçalves-Candeias et al., 2021).

The lack of autonomy within the position itself creates an environment of turnover and increases stress (Zito et al., 2018) because of the different tiers that the employee must continually meet to qualify for a low-paying job. Company leaders should have other alternatives for the employee within the organization if they want a long-term employee. Employees should have the opportunity to experience autonomy within their position. The call center representative has a lack of choice because it is a very rigid job. They operate in stressful work environments featuring monitored phone calls, inquiries, complaints, and timed interactions throughout the day (Posey, 2019). The hindrances increase due to the demand that they meet specific criteria for the job even when every situation is not the same (Gonçalves-Candeias et al., 2021).

The emotional strain and emotional intelligence of pretending to sound empathetic over the phone can lead to burnout (Feyerabend et al., 2018). It is confusing and frustrating for a call center agent to relate to the customer’s situation. Pretending to understand the customer's situation can cause emotional strain and a disconnect between the customer and call center representative (Efmanuel et al., 2020). Call center representatives must be resilient and authentically emphasize with the customer (Feyerabend et al., 2018).

The physical environment of the employee's work is crucial and impacts how the employee values and feels about their position, which affects their job satisfaction (Zito et al., 2018). A set-up featuring a small cubicle with employees right beside one another, with the only divider being a wall, may be a visual sign of their insignificance for some workers. Feeling like an assembly line worker can lower employee morale (Emanuel et al., 2020). Feeling like a number with insignificance within the organization can lead employees to become less engaged, which increases turnover. An optimistic and effective work relationship increases employee retention (Zito et al., 2018).

Company Culture

The ability to instill the company culture is critical. Seventy-five percent of turnover (involuntary and voluntary) in call centers occurs within the first month of employment (Valle & Ruz, 2015). The other high involuntary turnover occurs within 12 to 16 months in the call center organization (Feyeraband, 2018; Valle et al., 2017). Therefore, organizational leaders have a very short time to instill value and a sense of belonging within the organization for long-term employment. Additionally, new employees often depart when they are more productive and proficient for the company after completing their initial training (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018a; Feyeraband, 2018).

Leadership is the connection between the employee and the organization's culture. Poor leadership is the number one reason employees leave an organization (Bake, 2019). Ethical and effective leadership maintains a high -performing work environment that results in positive employee engagement and has a positive effect on retention (Bake, 2019). The supervisor's ability to incentivize and promote an employees' motivation through their social environment helps to reduce turnover (Al-Qathmi & Zedan, 2021).

If the supervisor can display the importance the frontline employees have in their work environment, this may increase retention. The examples ethical leaders display are what employees adopt (Isiramen, 2021). If an employee cannot identify with the organization, then the employee is a higher risk for employee turnover (Dwesini, 2019; Dechawatanapaisal, 2018a).

In the hospitality industry, low-pay is common, and it is no different being a call center representative (Gonçalves-Candeias et al., 2021). The call center representative position is repetitive with challenges that typically exceed the pay for the job. Feyerabend et al. (2018) stated that many call center representatives are overqualified because they possess a college degree. Therefore, many call center representatives are underpaid and overqualified.

Analysis of the Conceptual Framework

Job embeddedness theory, which was introduced by Mitchell et al. (2001), was the conceptual framework for this study. Mitchell et al. derived the theory from the social embeddedness theory. Also reviewed are supporting contrasting theories, including Herzberg's two-factor theory, the eight forces framework of attachment and voluntary turnover, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Vroom's expectancy theory, transformational leadership, and the ABCD model. The discussions include recognized similarities and key differences from the job embeddedness theory.

Social Embeddedness

Job embeddedness is derived from the social embeddedness theory. Granovetter (1985) introduced the social embeddedness theory derived from the impact of social networks and economic outcomes. The social network and economic outcomes are based upon four concepts: (a) norms and network density, (b) the strength of work ties, (c) the importance of structural holes, and (d) the interpenetration of economic and noneconomic action. The interpretation of economic and noneconomic action emphasizes social embeddedness.

The precursors to job embeddedness theory were the ideas that norms and network density pertain to employee conduct in an organization. The strength of work ties is stronger with acquaintances than with close friends because the acquaintances are usually in the same occupational field but lack a different viewpoint and ingenious material. The importance of structural holes are how the different networks assemble and communicate information one to another. The interpenetration of economic and noneconomic actions is intertwined with cause and effect. For example, economic actions are linked to institutions in noneconomic ways (Granovetter, 1985).

With the introduction of the job embeddedness theory, Mitchell et al. (2001) replaced the precursor concepts with three main concepts: fit, links, and sacrifice. Fit replaced norms and network density. Fit focuses on and includes how to conduct self at work, within the organizations, and work environment. Links replaced the strength of work ties because it is the connection of people in and outside of one's work environment. Sacrifice replaced the interpenetration of economic and noneconomic actions because the employee must surrender one thing for another if they leave the institution because of other needs.

Job Embeddedness

Job embeddedness theory introduced by Mitchell et al. (2001) was the conceptual framework for this study. Mitchell et al. (2001) and Holtom et al. (2006) believed employees remained at their current jobs due to multifaceted reasons beyond job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is a popular known factor that companies focus on for employee retention; however, employee turnover also occurs amidst high job satisfaction

(Al-Suraihi et al., 2021). Therefore, job satisfaction does not explain the turnover intentions and behaviors associated with nonwork factors (Chan et al., 2019). Compared to job satisfaction, job embeddedness has been a better indicator of job retention (Holtom et al., 2006). Job embeddedness looks into different factors that attach an employee and establish long tenure with an organization (Chan et al., 2019). Job embeddedness retention strategies have helped to reduce the costly effects of replacing human resources from voluntary turnover (Tan et al., 2019).

There is a direct link between job embeddedness, job performance, and career satisfaction (Linder, 2018). Identifying effective job embeddedness factors in an above average turnover retention rate is crucial to remain competitive in the hospitality industry (Chen & Ayoun, 2019). The more embedded an employee is, the more involved they are in the organization’s business and connected to other employees and management (Rahimnia et al., 2019).

Job embeddedness focuses on how embedded the employee is within the organization and their community (Rahimnia et al., 2019). Job embeddedness focuses on different reasons an employee stays with an organization because of different stimuli (Porter et al., 2019). Stimuli on-the-job includes interpersonal relationships with coworkers on and off-the-job and their compatibility with job and job skills (Mitchell et al., 2001). Turnover intention is reduced from different types training (Ju & Li, 2019). Highly embedded individuals have higher risks that affects their interpersonal relationships (Chan et al., 2019). On-the-job stimuli are more beneficial to the company because of the direct ties to the company, unlike off-the-job stimuli which may represent reasons for turnover (Porter et al., 2019).

External job stimuli include factors occurring in the employee's family life and community (Mitchell et al., 2001). For example, appraisals of work-family-life balance has been implicated in turnover intention (Lim et al., 2021). However, as an employee increases ties to their work, which intertangles with family, personal, and community commitments the more likely this employee is enmeshed, reinforcing long-term employment with that organization (Mitchell et al., 2001; Chan et al., 2019). Accordingly, job embeddedness includes psychological, social, and financial components (MeiRun et al., 2018). Off-the-job embeddedness can influence one to seek job opportunities elsewhere once approached by another outside connection, especially when the individual is not highly embedded on-the-job (Porter et al., 2019).

The positive outcome of job embeddedness is a higher retention rate among others in the same industry. When an employee is embedded in their job, they are more committed to the organization with intentions to stay with the organization (Shehawy et al., 2018). The human resource policies, practices and employee-organization relationship can affect employees' job embeddedness (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018a). The different ways employees are connected to an organization creates job embeddedness. Mitchell et al. (2001) denoted the different ways that bind an employee to an organization (fit, link, and sacrifice), which can be embedded in different ways as the employee becomes connected to the organization and/or to the community.

The negative outcome of job embeddedness is the cost of the personal reasons employees may stay. Many employees may want to leave their positions but nevertheless stay (Bogaert et al., 2019). An employee may have few choices when wanting to leave an organization but may also be heavily invested in the company with significant relationships within the organization (Gan et al., 2020). Although the company's retention strategy may ineffective, employees may stay in negative work environments, such as those characterized by bullying and ostracism, leading to damaging results for the employee (Li et al., 2021).

Fit. The concept of fit is how compatible the employee's capabilities are with the organization and work environment (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018b; Mitchell et al., 2001; Chan et al., 2019; Porter et al., 2019; Holtcom et al., 2006). Certain job characteristics like job security and flexibility increases productivity and retention, especially when they align with employees' preferences and needs (Chen, 2019). Being on the frontline with customers, employees who are aware of their personal values, job principles, and stances can be more aware of how to align with company cultures, customers, and other employees (Afsar & Badir, 2016). When the employee identifies with the organization in a positive way, embeddedness increases (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018a). Better relationships existing between employees and management result in higher engagement while negative relationships leading to a lack of engagement can diminish one's sense of value in the workplace (Li et al., 2021).

One of the ways employees perceive the organization is through the leadership. If the leadership is perceived as being highly ethical then the organization is perceived the same way, which reflects the culture (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018a). An employee adapts easier when their skillset, goals, and ethical outlooks align with the job and organizational culture (Chan et al., 2019; MeiRun et al., 2018; Holtom et al., 2006). The employee also has a fit within the community and their surrounding environment by means of the general customs, climate, and features (Holtom et al., 2006). However, an increase in job insecurity has a negative outcome regardless to job embeddedness on or off-the-job (Safavi & Karatepe, 2019).

Links. Links are the employee's actual connections within the workplace and with people (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018a; Mitchell et al 2001; Porter et al. 2019; Holtom et al., 2006). Developing proper and casual ties with people help bind workers to an organization (Hussain & Deery, 2018; Coetzer et al., 2019). Community investments like clubs and committees attach people to their jobs (Gonzalez et al., 2018; Porter et al., 2019). Positive links include good connections between management, nonmanagement, and fellow colleagues (Chan et al., 2019; MeiRun et al., 2018). For example, workplace coaching between the employees and management can effectively enhance job embeddedness (Bozer & Jones, 2018). Lower interactional connections between employees and lower management may stem from communication difficulties or employees' fears (Tan et al., 2019). When employees do have solid relationships or links with ethical leaders, there is a positive effect on employees and job embeddedness (Zhou et al., 2020). The external links outside of the work organization are the influence factors from family members and other social institutions affecting embeddedness (Holtom et al., 2006).

Sacrifice. Sacrifice pertains to what the employee will surrender if they leaves their current position (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018b; Mitchell et al., 2001; Holtom et al., 2006). The employee must consider on-the-job and off-the-job benefits before deciding to leave an organization, which include psychological, financial, and interpersonal relationship factors (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018b; Mitchell et al., 2001; MeiRun et al., 2018). The sacrifices involving community include such benefits as safe home environments, suitable neighborhoods, or short commutes to work (Holtom et al., 2006). The decision to leave a job can be stressful, complicated, and uncertain (Holtom et al., 2006). The different projects, perks, and benefits within the job typically are subjects of great consideration when deciding to leave an organization (Hussain & Deery, 2018; Porter et al., 2019).

Supporting and Contrasting Theories

The following subsections include contrasting theories to the job embeddedness theory (revolving around fit, links, and sacrifice). Alternative theories reviewed and discussed include Herzberg's two-factor theory, the eight forces framework of attachment and voluntary turnover, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Vroom's expectancy theory, transformational leadership, and the ABCD model. The review includes noted similarities and key differences from job embeddedness theory.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

The origin of the Herzberg's two-factor theory is the idea of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and based upon the variances between motivational factors and hygiene factors (Alrawahi et al., 2020). Herzberg's theory revolves around satisfaction and dissatisfaction in the work environment (Zhang et al., 2020). The two factors are based upon motivation: which are also attributable to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, including self-actualization; development, accountability, and a meaningful job can help one achieve self-actualization (Alrawahi et al., 2020). The second factor is hygiene: social relations, relationships with coworkers and management (Zhang et al., 2020).

According to Herzberg (1959), dissatisfaction and satisfaction occur on an individual basis. Increased motivation factors may retain employees better than hygiene factors because the motivation factors fuel the employee's satisfaction (Suleman et al., 2020). The motivation factors include (a) advancement, (b) the work itself, (c) growth prospects, (d) responsibility, I recognition, and (f) achievement (Herzberg et al., 1959). Herzberg's hygiene factors include (a) interpersonal relations, (b) company policies and administration, (c) supervision, (d) salary, a(e) work conditions.

The motivation factors and hygiene factors are weighed differently (Peng, 2020). The motivation factors are stronger indicators to producing greater employee satisfaction and the absence of motivation factors create dissatisfaction (Suleman et al., 2020). The hygiene factors are poor indications of employee satisfaction; the actual indications are that of no dissatisfaction, but it does not mean the employee is satisfied, and the absence of hygiene factors creates dissatisfaction and may be extrinsic motivation to the job (Alrawahi et al., 2020). Therefore, there are specific separate entities determining job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction because they are not opposite of each other but have different parts governing if an employee is satisfied or dissatisfied.

Both job embeddedness and Herzberg's two-factor theory contend that the organizational environment can affect employees' hygiene factors (Skelton et al., 2020). Herzberg's two-Factor theory and job embeddedness are similar in that both agrees with having a natural fit within the organization is important for job retention. The ability for each employee to see options within the organization for growth is essential for job retention (Suleman et al., 2020).

Leadership, work environment, and interpersonal relationships within the organization are important and reasons for higher job retention (Offer & Fischer, 2018). The leadership has the ability to influence the employees and how supervisors interact with frontline employees is crucial for how employees view themselves within the organization (Li et al., 2021). The different ways to acknowledge employees is important to retain the best employees (Al-Qathmi & Zedan, 2021). Leadership should be able to positively influence the work environment and generate competitive pay among other strategies with their organizations to be able to attract and retain employees in their same industries (Lollo & O'Rourke, 2020).

CCALL difference between job embeddedness and Herzberg's two-factor theory is job embeddedness extends beyond the interpersonal relationships on-the-job to interpersonal relationships outside the work environment; accordingly, those external factors would have more influence on job retention. The important outside work factors to consider are the influences and interrelationships of families and the employees' communities (Lim et al., 2021). Herzberg's two-factor theory is similar to job embeddedness because it considers the job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction; however, job embeddedness considers factors that is beyond the workplace which may outweigh one's satisfaction and dissatisfaction with one's job because of the influencing factors of the family and community.

Eight Forces Framework of Attachment and Voluntary Turnover

The eight forces framework by Maertz and Griffeth (2004) proposes eight different categories that affect an employee's reason to leave an organization. The eight categories are called forces and include (a) affective, contractual, calculative, alternative, behavioral, normative moral, and constituent forces. Maertz et al. (2012) later added a ninth force, which is location attachment, or community embeddedness.

Affective forces consist of how comfortable the employee feels good or bad about the organization which creates attachment or withdrawal. Contractual forces are how psychologically attached an employee is to the organization. The calculative forces focus on the future possibilities within the organization. The better futuristic outcomes cause longer employment but is not favorable when the future becomes bleak with higher turnover intentions. Alternative forces are the higher the options the greater chances of employee turnover. Behavioral forces consider the negative effects of leaving an organization tangibly and psychologically. The normative forces consider the family opinion about staying or leaving an organization. The moral factor considers internalized values either wrong to change jobs or it the right thing to do. The constituent forces are when an employee feel attached or detached due to their relationship with management and fellow employees which is a determining factor if the employee stays at the organization (Maertz et al., 2012).

The eight forces are similar to job embeddedness principles and have motivational factors. However, more emphasis of current practices within businesses is a major difference between the job embeddedness theory and the eight forces framework. Mitchell et al. (2001) reported that embeddedness variables had incremental effects in explaining turnover behavior beyond established predictors, which were concepts applied within the eight forces framework of attachment by Maertz et al. (2012).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

According to Maslow (1943), there is a hierarchy of needs that people have and a progression from one levels of needs to the next; there must be certain criteria met before advancing to the next motivational need. Maslow listed five levels: (a) physiological, (b) safety, (c) love, (d) esteem, and (e) self-actualization. People must achieve the first level by having such needs fulfilled, before advancing to meeting needs at the next level, and so on.

The first need is physiological needs, or everyday essential needs, like sleep, food, and water. The second need is safety—safety of resources, safety in employment, safety in health, and property. The first two needs are basic; however, the physiological needs are met first before obtaining the second basic need of safety. The third need is love and belonging, such as with family and socially. The fourth level is esteem, developed through confidence, respect, and a sense of achievement. The last level is self-actualization derived from morality, acceptance, and creativity. The highest level of self-actualization is also when one achieves their full potential (Maslow, 1943).

The Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs focuses on human needs without regard to the individual emotions and outside attachments that relate to the job. One's ability is only to meet needs in a hierarch–l order - not out of order or at the same time. Job embeddedness does not rank one over the other. Instead, the theory pertains to the idea of fulfilling different components that could enhance the likelihood of the employee staying with the organization.

Vroom's Expectancy Theory

The expectancy theory by Vroom (1964) encompasses the idea that employees unconsciously choose their behaviors based upon the least amount of pain while maximizing pleasure. Vroom stated that employees' personality, skills, knowledge, experiences, and abilities determine their performance. The expectancy theory of Vroom is based upon (a) valence, (b) expectancy, and c) instrumentality.

Valence revolves around the extrinsic and intrinsic rewards and best outcome, so management must discover what their employees' value. Expectancy varies among employees and management must know how to utilize the resources, training and supervision needed. Instrumentality is how much the employee believes that management will follow through with the rewards according to their performance (Vroom, 1964).

The expectancy theory places certain expectations on management and the employees. First, there is a focus on motivation and appropriate rewards, appropriate training, and employees' beliefs in being rewarded in specific ways by management (Zboja et al., 2020). The Vroom (1964) expectancy theory is different from the theory of job embeddedness because it does not include a focus on connections of the employee within and outside the organization. The expectancy theory does not include a focus on the work environment, except for how to reward the employee. Additionally, outside of the reward system, there have been other noted factors an employee may consider when contemplating leaving the organization (Isiramen, 2021). Therefore, the expectancy theory is shallow with respect to ways to retain employees for long-term employment, and different levels to address to keep an employee for a long-term tenure.

Transformational Leadership

Burns (1978) developed the ideas regarding transformational leadership. The transformational leaders lead with a collective purpose and the ability to make social change (Lai et al., 2020). If the leader’s behaviors lead to successes, then the leaders expect the followers to do the same from that example as leaders develop relationships among their followers (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). The transformational leadership is based upon (a) encouraging, (b) inspiring, (c) and motivating employees (Burns, 1978). The four main components of Burns’ transformational leadership are (a) individualized considerations, (b) intellectual stimulation, (c) inspirational motivation, and (d) idealized influence.

The leader and followers assist one another to reach the mission of the organization with identifying each as a major component to effectively accomplish the goals (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). The leaders’ individualized consideration mentor followers and listen to their needs (Sahu et al., 2018). The leader respectfully supports and offers challenges (Lai et al., 2020). Positive outcomes of the relationship between the leader and the followers include aspiring to higher self-development, among personal reasons to achieve their duties and leaders accountable for their leadership (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018).

The leader executes intellectual stimulation by adhering to followers' suggestions and ideas (Sahu et al., 2018). The leader promotes creativity and seeks out inquisitive and independent people to develop (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). The leader looks for ways to make the current way more effective and profitable with the whole team's set of views (Sahu, et al., 2018). The transformational leader promotes change to benefit all who are involved- leaders and followers (Lai et al., 2020).

The leaders' use of inspirational motivation is the ability to project a vision that appeals to the followers with a can-do attitude, excellence, hopefulness and confidence in completing the vision (Sahu, et al., 2018). The followers are inspired, encouraged, and optimistic about their abilities in fulfilling the vision (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). By working together, the leaders and followers can progressively make social changes (Lai et al., 2020).

The last concept for a transformational leader is idealized influence. The transformational leader is someone the followers believe in because the leader is an ethical role model (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). The leaders have gained the trust of followers (Lai et al., 2020). The followers believe the leader and trust that the leader has their best interests in mind (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018).

Transformational leadership and job embeddedness are similar with the encounters of management and subordinate employees important to establish great relationships to get end results. Leaders under transformational leadership focus on how to stimulate the followers by inspiration, motivation, encouragement (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018), loyalty and trust (Lai et al., 2020). However, the transformational leadership theory lacks as a sound device for thoroughly and comprehensively understanding and explaining employee intentions to leave the organization (Sahu, et. al, 2018). Within the transformational leadership and job embeddedness theory, connections between management and employees are important. However, the strength and flaw of transformational leadership is the leader. There are not multiple factors to keep the employee engaged like job embeddedness- fit and links.

ABCD Model

The ABCD model developed by Ellis in 1987 is based on four constructs: (a) acquire, (b) bond, (c) comprehend, and (d) defend drives. Acquire is seeking, obtaining, and influencing things and materials in possession. Acquiring pertains to the different things the company has to offer, like promotions, increases in pay, and authority. The drive to bond is the ability to have relationships with mutual fondness. If bonding, socializing, and belonging grows for the employees, then motivation is high; when these are unsatisfactory, then negative feelings emerge, and employees do not feel connected to the company or coworkers. The drive to comprehend is to understand one’s environment with a sense of curiosity. The drive to comprehend includes observing, researching, analyzing their environment for reasons to communicate to self or with others. The drive to defend is the opposite of the drives to acquire because it is reactive (Cakir & Kozak, 2017).

The ABCD model and job embeddedness theories have similarities. Both theories focus on connections between the job and the employees by bonding and connecting with others within the organization. However, the ABCD model encompasses only what the organization can provide within the organization and does not include the consideration of outside factors, like family and community.

Retention Strategies in the Call Center Industry

The ability of an organization to deter voluntary employee turnover is a competitive advantage; unhealthy attrition is detrimental to an organization's performance (Ju & Li, 2019). The following sections include a review of published literature pertaining to employee retention strategies in the call center industry. The section begins with recruitment and training findings, leading to discussions of the work environment. Research regarding employee engagement and embeddedness leads to findings about career development as it pertains to employee retention in the airline business and call center arena.

Recruitment and Training of Qualified Candidates

The first retention strategy is recruiting and selecting the appropriate person for the job (Valle et al., 2017). Hiring the best human capital for the job is an advantage that can be a prolonged resource in an organization (Dwesini, 2019). Evaluating work history and experiences can be revealing; for example, a potential prospect with a history of job hopping may not be an ideal candidate and short-term employees could strain organizational finances through ongoing costs of interviewing, hiring, training, and induction (Dhanpat et al., 2018). The ability for the recruiter to draw in, develop, and acknowledge suitable employees and their efforts increase the likelihood of long-term employment and decreasing attrition (Dwesini, 2019).

During the recruiting process, the potential prospect can take a self-assessment personality trait test; Valle et al., (2017) stated that employees with high levels of extroversions traits tend to stay longer in call centers. The self-assessment personality trait test should also include testing potential candidates' emotional intelligence for the proper emotional qualifications (Feyeraband, 2018). Due to high emotional drainage and stressful phone calls, emotional intelligence could be a determining factor for job satisfaction and retention strategies (Suleman et al., 2020). Emotional intelligence is affectional awareness and the ability to accomplish your tasks with others (Feyeraband, 2018). Emotional intelligence is a direct link between job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Suleman et al., 2020). If the employee's emotional intelligence is low or needs a boost, it is important to implement human resource development activities in emotional intelligence to decrease turnover (Dwesini, 2019).

Selecting the potential candidate for the position requires appropriate training, which is crucial due to the sometimes complicated and emotionally draining demands of being a call center representative (Feyeraband, 2018). During training and throughout employment, the employee needs clarity to perform the job because turnover intention may be less when employees know and can work toward the established criteria for job performance (Al-Suraihi et al., 2021). Appropriate and frequent supportive feedback can increase affective commitment of employees because of perceived managerial and organizational support (Dhanpat et al., 2018). Hence, an employee may be regularly assessed for the meeting of required job performances, such as each month for the first 3 months of employment (Dwesini, 2019).

Furthermore, granting employees a fair and competitive wage opportunity might also help attract qualified candidates and reduce turnover intentions (Dwesini, 2019). According to Dhanpat et al. (2018), salary and compensation are primary precursors of employees' turnover in most call centers previously studied. Minimum wage with limited upward mobility is often associated with call center representative positions (Zito et al., 2018; Feyerabend et al., 2018). While pay and compensation is not a sole predictor of turnover in call centers, the recognition of employees that they may be earning relatively low wages, compared to others in different companies or positions, may result in dissatisfaction, absenteeism, and increased turnover (Dhanpat et al., 2018).

Work Environment

The culture and work environment factors are important for job retention (Zito et al., 2018). During the interview process, the closer the prospect matches the company's culture, the more likely the prospect will easily commit to the organization and have higher productivity for the organization (Dwesini, 2019). There are different ways the employer can acknowledge the employee. Employees feel valued by having different rewarding programs within the organization (Al-Suraihi et al., 2021). A contributing work environment is encouraging and inspiring to employees so that they aspire to do the work and return to work (Dwesini, 2019). The positive support of frontline employees by encouraging management can strengthen organizational commitment (Chan et al., 2019; MeiRun et al., 2018).

Empowerment increases embeddedness (Dwesini, 2019). Empowering the frontline employees by building their expertise and knowledge and encouraging their inquiry into ways to improve customer service is important because they must communicate with the customers on a daily basis (Zito et al., 2018). Empowering, building, encouraging, and supporting their interactions with customers emphasizes the value of their input within the organization. The organizational culture is a determining factor for commitment to the organization and building esteem and self-value through empowerment can help to encourage embeddedness (Dwesini, 2019). The more committed employees are to the organization, the more loyal they may be, willing to sacrifice for the organization (Shah et al., 2020).

Engagement and Embeddedness

The employees become more engaged by feeling safe within the organization (Al-Qathmi & Zedan, 2021). The employees should have the ability to freely speak by having open communication with management without being intimidated or fearful of retaliations (Bake, 2019). The more engaged and safer an employee feels the more likely they may be to commit to longevity with the organization. The importance of first level management is very important for employee engagement in relation to turnover intentions (Bake, 2019; Dwesini, 2019).

The employee feels valued if the company has other supportive resources in addition to job development. For instance, resources for personal development like wellness and ways to relieve stress like exercise equipment at the job location can enhance well-being that might promote job satisfaction and loyalty (Valle et al., 2017).

Additionally, knowing what the employees want, in terms of supportive resources from their employer, such as through surveys, helps the employer strategically invest in their employees for long-term employment (Al-Qathmi & Zedan, 2021).

When an employee is connected to the job with more than just their job duties, they are more likely to become embedded. An increase of interpersonal relationships between coworkers, and fellow coworkers (both at and away from the workplace) might help to increase job retention (Dwesini, 2019). The more connections an employee has socially, psychologically, and financially, the less likely they may be to voluntarily leave their jobs (Ullah et al., 2021). Therefore, when an employee considers what they would have to sacrifice to leave the organization, it could be essential for employers to utilize strategies that convey that staying with the organization would be the better outcome for the employee as well as the organization (Dwesini, 2019).

Career Development

The option to grow within the organization is important for long-term employment. The relationship between the lower-level manager and frontline employee are important for grooming the employee for career development within the organization and helps with higher career fulfillment and reduces employee turnover intentions. The employees need to feel like the organization supports them and that the employee is important to that establishment (Dwesini, 2019).

Employees want a variety of options than just career development. Employees want flexibility in a variety of ways that benefit them (Dhanpat et al., 2018). Employees typically want work and life balance options (Dwesini, 2019). An employee’s work-life balance is conducive when it increases their quality and value within the company (Lim et al., 2021). Employees may want flexible work schedules (Dwesini, 2019). Employees may have the same job, but do not want to have the same invariable job benefits, since there are a variety of employees and each may like being rewarded differently (Dhanpat et al., 2018).

Transition

The first section of this study included the background of the problem, problem statement, purpose statement, and nature of the study. I provided the rationale for the selection of qualitative methodology and a single-case study design. The research question, interview questions, conceptual framework, operational definitions, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations were presented. I also discussed the significance of the study. The last component of the section was the literature review.

The literature review included topics such as the components of the embeddedness job theory (fit, links, and sacrifice) and supporting and contrasting theories (Herzberg's two-factor Theory, the eight forces framework of attachment and voluntary turnover, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Vroom's expectancy theory, transformational leadership, and the ABCD model). Information about retention strategies in general and within call centers led to the identification of a need to further study call center retention within the airline industry in the United States. The literature review consisted on a synthesis of findings from scholarly articles obtain for the purpose of illuminating pertinent information foundational to the study.

Section 2 includes the purpose statement and explanations about the role of the researcher. Detailed discussions pertain to the participants from the population and the sampling strategy. The explanations about the research method and design, ethical research steps, data collection instruments and techniques, data organization and analysis lead to discussions about the reliability and validity, or trustworthiness, of the qualitative research.

Section 3 begins with the application to professional practice and implications for change. Included in the section are the presentation of the findings, applications to professional practice, implications for social change, and recommendations for actions. Section 3 also includes recommendations for further research and reflections. The finale of section 3 is the overall conclusion for the completed study.

Section 2: The Project

Section 2 includes the purpose statement and discussion of the role of the researcher, the research and design methods, and the ethical research steps that were applied. The section includes descriptions of the data collection instruments, data organization techniques, and data analysis processes. I also discuss the measures that I applied to ensure credible, dependable findings. This includes information on the means that I used to reach data saturation and the processes that I applied to member checking.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single-case study was to explore how airline business call center leaders use retention strategies to successfully alleviate voluntary turnover among customer service representatives. The targeted population consisted of call center leaders, in call centers located in a Texas airline business, who had implemented retention strategies that were successful in reducing call center customer service representative turnover. This population was appropriate for this study because 75% of attrition in call centers occurs within the first month of employment and call centers are notorious for high attrition rates (Valle & Ruiz, 2015). The COVID-19 pandemic further increased job insecurity across almost all industries and sectors, with perceptions of job insecurity increasing turnover intent (Jung et al., 2021).

The potential implications for positive social change include improved retention strategies; opportunities for promoting from within the organization; and increased employee morale, job security, value, and self-esteem. The culture of the organization may improve as lower employee turnover increases the quality of customer service provided, improves long-term training and development, and increases with employee engagement. Successful businesses may benefit from improved operations, optimized productivity, improved work conditions, organizational growth, competitive advantages, increased profits, increased employment opportunities, decreased unemployment rate, stability of the workforce, and enhanced customer service, which may promote a positive image towards customers and employees and strengthen local communities.

Role of the Researcher

The primary role of the researcher in qualitative research is as a data collection instrument responsible for dependable, reliable, and consistent data collection (Alpi & Evans, 2019). The researcher is responsible for carrying out a set of activities, including the recruitment of participants, implementation of the design of the study, acquisition of data acquisition, and the analysis and interpretation of results (Aspers & Corte, 2019). As the researcher, I adhered to the principles of the *Belmont Report*, which emphasize minimizing risks and harm to participants, while maximizing the potential benefits of the research (Hokke et al., 2018). I sought approval of Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to recruit participants, obtained informed consent from participants, conducted semistructured interviews to collect data, and analyzed the data and reported the findings.

The ability to separate my own biases was important because of my personal background in this field, consisting of more than 20 years of experience in customer service. However, being a knowledgeable insider could have improved the breadth and depth of data collection through the ability to establish rapport and pose thoughtful probative questions based on initial answers to the interview questions (Cristancho et al., 2018). To help mitigate biases, I used a data collection protocol for interviews and the review of documents. I sought to stay in a reflexive position, aware of my own values, opinions, and experiences in this field to keep the research credible and prevent viewing the data from a single personal perspective. The use of well-documented data collection protocols also helps to enhance confirmability and increase the trustworthiness of the study (Gani et al., 2020).

Additionally, to mitigate biases, I recorded the interviews and transcribed the information. Transcribing the recordings allowed for a verbatim record of the answers to the interview questions. Researchers act as “human instruments” (p. 120) and can be subject to distractions and data collection errors (Forero et al., 2018). Recording interviews is a way to capture verbatim data while focusing on the interviewees (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

As an inexperienced researcher, I relied on the interview protocol. Use of an interview protocol can help a researcher to be confident and consistent when conversing with the participants (Yeong et al., 2018). Interview protocols are guides that a researcher can follow to interview participants in a seamless, resourceful, and inclusive manner (Rashid et al., 2019). Interview protocols and preparation help interviewers ask interview questions in an unbiased, consistent order and manner, with prompting before and during an interview, to optimize the interview experience (Joshi et al., 2020). Additionally, interview protocols improve data quality and helps align research questions (Yeong et al., 2018). I relied on the interview protocol to carry out my role as the researcher.

Participants

I selected the study participants from a purposeful sample of call center leaders who had implemented best practice retention strategies in retaining call center representatives. I recruited participants using social media, including Indeed and LinkedIn, as well as Facebook and Instagram, which are regularly accessed by call center leaders. Social media websites are growing in popularity to recruit research participants (Kühne & Zindel, 2020). The eligibility criteria for study participants included call center leaders who had successfully implemented retention strategies for call center representatives working for a Texas airline business. The strategies for gaining access to participants were posting the invitation for participation on social media pages regularly accessed by the call center leaders of the business. The initial strategies of establishing a working relationship with the potential participants were by sending an invitation for participation, which included information on the study and a consent form. Additionally, the information included the reason for the informed consent and assurances of confidentiality. I sent all information by email. If the participant had any questions, they could communicate by email and if necessary, arrange to call me to answer questions about participation in the study.

Research Method and Design

A qualitative method was the methodological selection for exploring retention strategies used in an airline business call center. I used a qualitative method to explore call center leaders' reflections and experiences related to strategies for increasing employee retention. The use of the qualitative single-case study design may lead to new insights and reveal social complexity, through its flexibility and ability to thoroughly explore the problem (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). I identified major thematic findings that further understanding of the strategies applied by participating call center leaders to reduce voluntary turnover of call center representatives.

Research Method

The study involved a qualitative research method to explore the strategies that leaders used to alleviate customer service representative turnover in the call center work environment of a Texas airline business. The qualitative research method was more subjective than the quantitative research method; yet, use of this method allowed me to interact with participants who were able to express their perceptions, ideas, thoughts, and experiences, which culminated in major thematic findings. Use of the qualitative research method allows the interviewer to focus on why and how certain things occur (Fàbregues & Fetters, 2019). By using the qualitative method, the researcher can allow a holistic viewpoint to develop, often through interviews (McGrath et al., 2019). I chose the qualitative research method to explore successful strategies that call center leaders used to alleviate employee turnover, which led to the identification of emergent themes.

Use of the qualitative research method allows for exploration and understanding of a phenomenon as opposed to the quantitative research method, which emphasizes objectivity, is structured and is focused on the testing of hypotheses (Tobi & Kampen, 2018). Both qualitative and quantitative research methods can lead to credible results and can be combined in a mixed-method approach (Martiny et al., 2021). However, quantitative research typically occurs in a structured, controlled, and objective manner with numerical data about known variables, while qualitative research is more oriented toward contextualized explanations, explorations, or descriptions (Renjith et al., 2021).

The combination of a qualitative and quantitative research method can be advantageous because of its wider scope (Martiny et al., 2021). However, use of a mixed-method approach would not have benefitted this research. The purposes of a qualitative research study revolve around gaining insight, generating ideas, and uncovering prevalent trends; the sample is relatively small, and the findings are not statistical nor generalizable (Aspers & Corte, 2019). The focus of a quantitative research is to quantify data through measurements, ideally conducted with a random sample, structured data collection, statistical data analysis, and generalizable inferences (Tobi & Kampen, 2018). This qualitative research was focused on gaining an in-depth understanding of experiences and perspectives from a relatively small sample of individuals from a narrow population, with data collected and analyzed in a nonstatistical manner, leading to nongeneralizable yet contextualized results.

Research Design

There are different choices for qualitative research: phenomenology, narrative, ethnography, grounded theory, historical, and case studies (Renjith et al., 2021). I chose a single-case study. A case study seemed more suitable than other designs because of its real-world context, garnering perspectives from multiple informants, bringing about an understanding of a complex phenomenon, and answering the “how’s” and “why’s” with in-depth explanations (Yin, 2017). Case study research is often focused on a single real-life bounded system rather than multiple systems, groups, or subjects (Alpi & Evans, 2019). I aimed to explore and understand the fundamental practices of leaders in a single call center that successfully alleviated attrition for call center representatives. Thus, a single-case study was an appropriate design for this research purpose.

The phenomenological design focuses on the essence and meaning of human experiences (Martiny et al., 2021). This study focus was on only on successful strategies to alleviating attrition and what the leaders implemented to reduce voluntary turnover in the call center and not the essence or meaning of leaders' experiences. The ethnography design was not suitable for this study because of the requirement for substantial immersion in the culture or settings (Tobi & Kampen, 2018), which was beyond the scope of this study. The narrative research design unveils the participants' stories and how they are formed chronologically and meaningfully (Sharp et al., 2018). A thorough understanding of business strategies was unlikely to emerge from focusing on each participant's personal and chronological story. This study resulted in a greater understanding of business leaders' applied strategies through the implementation of a case study design.

In qualitative studies, the concept of data saturation is a guide for determining the adequacy of a sample or sample size (Hennink et al., 2019). Rather than statistically determining a minimum sample size (as in quantitative research), determining an adequate sample size in qualitative research involves the ability to discern the saturation of data (Renjith et al., 2021). Data saturation is the point at which no new data appears to emerge from additional data collection efforts (Saunders et al., 2018). A semistructured questionnaire with opened ended interview questions can help to generate the breadth and depth of data necessary for data saturation to occur (Hennink et al., 2019). Therefore, conducting a semistructured interview with each participant in my sample, combined with document review, member checking, and the collection of data from multiple informants brought attention to the point at which data became repetitive which indicated data saturation after interviews of five participants.

Population and Sampling

The population for this study included call center leaders who successfully implemented retention strategies for call center representatives located in a Texas airline business. The Texas airlines call center employs over 900 people, of which 40 serve in leadership positions. This study included criterion-based purposeful sampling as its sampling method for selecting call center leaders from this population of leaders in the airlines business in Texas. The criterion-based purposeful sampling strategy is a nonrandom convenience sampling approach to choose information-rich participants in a study from a specific population (Casteel & Bridier, 2021). The criterion sampling process increases the likelihood of data saturation with a manageable amount of data and eliminates participants who do not meet certain criteria aligned with the objectives of the study (Ames et al., 2019). Criterion sampling is a sampling approach that increases data quality among the participants (Andrade, 2021). I chose participants for the study based on a purposeful sampling technique which helped to ensure that participants in the study met the criteria for participation. Eligibility was through the self-report of participants.

The criteria for participant selection were call center leaders who worked in call center management between 2005 and 2022 and were over 18 years of age. The eligibility criteria for study participants included call center leaders who successfully implemented retention strategies for call center representatives located in a Texas airline business. The chosen call center had over 900 employees at the time of the study, of whom 40 were in leadership positions. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, all employees worked in the call center; at the time of the study, over 90% worked from home.

I began this study by recruiting participants through social media, with the use of LinkedIn and Indeed websites, as well as Facebook and Instagram, which were utilized by call center leaders of the business. These social media websites have become frequently utilized means to recruit research participants (Kühne & Zindel, 2020). I recruited call center managers by posting invitations for leaders to participate. I followed up with the inquiries and interests received with an email introduction to the study with an informed consent form attached. The procedures were obtaining informed consent, then setting up interviews. During the interview process, I reminded each participant that this study was confidential, averaged about 45 minutes, and would be audio recorded and transcribed, then participants would receive initial interpretations of data to participate in a voluntary member checking process.

The projected sample size for this single-case study was five call center leaders from one call center in Texas. Interviewing a sample size of five call center leaders in a Texas airline business call center led to the data saturation necessary to achieve in the study. Although five people were projected as the sample size, if data saturation did not occur, the number of participants may have been greater than five. A suggested approach to sample size in qualitative research is to start with a small number of participants and then to recruit additional participants to the sample until data saturation is evident (Vasileiou et al., 2018). After interviewing five participants, and reviewing related documents, there was recognition of data saturation, so it was unnecessary to recruit and interview additional participants. The interviews included a semistructured interview format, which represented a probative means to achieving data saturation (Aarsand & Aarsand, 2018; Tomaszewski, 2020).

Ethical Research

I requested approval from Walden University's IRB before collecting data. Ethical research begins with unbiased equitable recruitment efforts and informed consent of the prospective participants (Lee, 2018). The participants were able to take as much time as they needed to read and sign the informed consent form before participating in the study. I accepted participants into the study based on the order in which consented to the informed consent terms and scheduled an interview. The informed consent form (worded in simple terminology) included a brief description of the study, the purpose of the study, who was conducting the study, privacy, risks/benefits of the study, the amount of time expected for it to take, sample questions, and contact information about the researcher and academic institution for questions, concerns, or desire to withdraw from the study. No participant requested withdrawal from the study.

The informed consent form also addresses risks and confidentiality. Other than the volunteer of time and effort in the data collection process and minor everyday discomforts of sitting, talking, and using the computer, there were no anticipated risks of harm to participants in this study. There was no use of deception and no expectations of financial, psychological, or financial harm. Furthermore, confidentiality procedures help to further protect participants' identities in the study (Gani et al., 2020). Pseudonyms are a common practice to replace the name of a person or business to conceal their identity (Gerrard, 2021). The use of pseudonyms is especially common in research involving interviews of participants (Heaton, 2021). I assigned each participant an alphanumeric pseudonym (P1 for the first participant to interview, P2 for the second participant to interview, and so on). I kept a key to the identities in a locked cabinet in my home, separate from the de-identified data, which were stored electronically in a password-protected computer. I am the only person with the key to the cabinet and knowledge of the password to the computer. The key to the assigned pseudonyms was useful in the even that there is a request for withdrawal from the study.

The informed consent form included the IRB approval number, which indicated that the IRB had reviewed and approved the document. I informed the participants that I would store the data securely for 5 years to protect the confidentiality of participants. After 5 years, the data will be destroyed. Additionally, I communicated to the participants that there were no gifts, payments, or reimbursements for participating. Lastly, I assured the participants they were free to withdraw at any time (by email, face-to-face, or telephone) without any adverse consequences, which ensured that participation was voluntary (Sobacan et al., 2018). The documents did not include names or any identifiable information about the person or the organization. Pseudonyms were assigned to de-identify data. The names of participants assigned to the pseudonyms were stored separate from other data in a locked cabinet in my home, useful in case a participants request withdrawal from the study. I was the only person who has possession of the key to the locked cabinet. The list will be destroyed with the other data, 5 years after the study, by burning.

Data Collection Instruments

A well written quality research study emulates the conceptual framework, with the data collection plans aligning with and remaining within the boundaries of the purpose and research questions (Casteel et al., 2021). The overarching research question pertained to the specific business problem and purpose, with the conceptual framework underpinning the study; data collection through interviews and document review aligned with those elements of this study. Qualitative data collection instruments may include observations, interviews, documents, and or audiovisual materials (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Yin (2017) stated six different ways to obtain case study evidence: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. I collected data from multiple informants, in the form of interviews and documentation.

I was the primary data collection instrument in this study. I conducted semistructured interviews asking open-ended questions and audio-recorded and transcribed the interviews. In addition, I collected related documents from publicly available sources and from participants who could contribute documents for review. Documents included those sources with explanations, examples, and protocols or policies pertaining to leadership strategies for employee retention and the reduction of voluntary turnover in the Texas airline call center.

I conducted one-on-one semistructured interviews by Zoom videoconferencing. This study included interview questions with open-ended answers, which help connect specific evidence with different issues within this case study (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Open ended questions in a semistructured format give the opportunity for additional probing until data saturation is reached (Gani et al., 2020). The questions were based upon the job embeddedness conceptual framework. The interview protocol is in Appendix A.

The data included the multiple informants' responses to the interview questions and documents reviewed to triangulate data. I enhanced the reliability and validity of the data collection by using member checking. The quality and validity increase when participants review the initial interpretations of the data collected in the study (Forero et al., 2018). Member checking gives the participants the opportunity to review the researcher's conclusions and interpretation for integrity (Tomaszewski, 2020). Member checking led to confirmation from participants that the interpretations of the data were consistent with their expressed meanings and experiences.

Data Collection Technique

After the IRB approved the study, I recruited participants using the letter of invitation in Appendix B. The email contained the purpose of the study, copy of informed consent form, and sample questions. I included the overarching research question: What retention strategies are used to reduce call center representatives' voluntary turnover? My primary way of the data collection technique was semistructured Zoom teleconferencing interviews. I collected documents electronically, including documents that participants emailed to me and through the access of publicly available website pages.

After I received the consent from participants who indicated “I consent” to the terms of the study as outlined in the informed consent form, I followed up with scheduling appointments for the interviews. I reminded participants that the interviews would be recorded for best accuracy for transcription purposes and asked participants to send me documents that could substantiate, explain, clarify, or exemplify the strategies they described. I started the interview with informing the participant of the confidentiality of their name and the call center’s organization and reminded participants verbally of the right to withdraw at any time. I advised the participants that the interviews would average about 45 minutes and later sent the initial interpretations of data for their added review and comment. I thanked each participant for their time before and after asking the interview questions.

I used an interview and document review protocol in compiling data. Documents shared by participants included exit interview notes, and documents that were publicly available including policies and procedures on employee websites, structured employee retention program descriptions, and information regarding formal and informal training opportunities. I reviewed the collected documents in accordance with the established document review protocols. An interview protocol and practicing interviewing techniques help build confidence and structure in the interview process (Yoeng et al., 2018). I followed the interview protocol, practiced interviewing techniques prior to the first interviews, and then transcribed the recoded interviews personally, in preparation for data analysis.

There are advantages and disadvantages to face-to-face semistructured interviews. An interview question should provoke conversation; therefore, interview questions should be asked differently than how the research question is written (Yeong et al., 2018). An advantage is the opportunity to develop rapport between the interviewer and interviewee (Rashid et al., 2019). The participants should be able to express freely with additional thoughts (McGrath et al., 2019). One of the best advantages is having prepared interview questions like from an interview protocol (Rashid et al., 2019). Another advantage is observing the participants' insight, perspective, and demeanor (Yeong et al., 2018). Additionally, face-to-face interviews allow the interviewer to observe the participant (Fusch et al., 2018). However, many of these advantages were also possible through the use of videoconferencing to conduct the interviews in this study.

Disadvantages of semistructured interviews include the possibility of collecting voluminous data that is difficult to manage and analyze (McGrath et al., 2019). A disadvantage for novice interviewers is deviating from research purpose, which can be mitigated by adherence to data collection protocols and practice interviews (Rashid et al., 2019). A disadvantage for a novice is their lack of experience and techniques for interviewing take time and thought to develop (McGrath et al., 2019). Another disadvantage may be an interviewer's lack of ability to probe further for clarity, staying focused, and redirecting participant to stay on topic (Yeong et al., 2018).

During interviews, if I was unclear on any answer, I restated the question or gave an interpretation of what I believed was stated. I used member checking to assure that my interpretation of the data was accurate. Member checking ensures soundness in interpretations and accuracy of the analytical process (Forero et al., 2018; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Yang et al., 2018). Each participant received a copy of the initial interpretations of data for feedback, to check for correct interpretations and conclusions. I waited for feedback about the findings before moving forward with a more detailed data analysis process.

The review of documents enabled triangulation, which Rashid et al. (2019) described as integral to many qualitative case studies. Drawbacks of data from the review of documents include the possibility that documents offered and collected might be inaccessible, biased, incompletely legible, outdated, or not relevant to the goals of the study (Cardo, 2018). Diligence in document collection, astuteness, and adherence to the protocol established for the collection and review of documents were the strategies used to attempt to overcome the drawbacks noted.

Data Organization Technique

Data organization helps the research manage data in an orderly, accessible, and retrievable manner (Yin, 2017). To increase privacy protection, de-identifying data occurred by assigning a code to each participant and not identifying the company under study. De-identifying data and protecting participants' identities are widely applied techniques for the ethical treatment of human research subjects (Antes et al., 2019; Gani et al., 2020). I informed the participants of the digital audio recording of interviews and reassured the participants of their confidentiality in this study. I securely stored the electronic, audio, and hard files, and will continue to do so for 5 years on my personal laptop flash drive. After completion of each interview, and receipt of documents, I uploaded documents and notes to my password-protected laptop flash drive. After uploading data electronically, any hard copies of data such as handwritten notes or documents were shredded. The electronic files are in a password protected computer and I am the only person with knowledge of the password. After 5 years of storage, the electronic files will be erased.

Data Analysis

The analysis model was Yin's (2017) five-step analysis procedure: compiling the data, deconstructing the data, reassembling the data, interpretation of the data, and drawing conclusions from the data. I applied the five steps in a search for major themes that emerged from the data and represented answers to the research question. I used member checking for validation of the initial interpretations of data and enhancing the trustworthiness of findings. Following member checking, I continued with the search for themes following the five-step process.

Validity may increase with the analysis of data from multiple sources. Triangulation increases the sources and trustworthiness of evidence (Yin, 2017) improving the depth of findings (Fusch, 2018). Triangulation uncovers inconsistencies in developing patterns for an in-depth comprehension of the phenomenon (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). The different types of triangulations are data, investigator, and methodological (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I used methodological triangulation that included the collection and analysis of data from semistructured interviews and the review of documents. During analysis, I was attentive to how the multiple diverse sources of data converged and diverged throughout the thematic analysis process.

Advances in technology brought about computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (Smit & Scherman, 2021). Although computer software may be difficult to learn and use effectively, there are benefits for the users in terms of management, organization, and appreciation of data (Schmieder, 2020). This software can be useful to store data, categorize, and search for themes (Houghton et al., 2017). I used the qualitative software NVivo 11 Plus because of some of the convenient features like auto-coding. This software was helpful with data organization, storage, sorting, coding, leading to the reporting of isolated findings, concepts, and ideas.

Throughout the data analysis process, involving compiling the data, deconstructing the data, reassembling the data, interpreting data, and drawing conclusions, I was cognizant of the patterns in the data that emerged as themes. Important to recognize is how those emergent themes pertain to the conceptual framework and overarching research question (Fàbregues & Fetters 2019). The key themes that emerged were discussed and interpreted considering the peer-reviewed literature and the conceptual framework, job embeddedness theory. I reviewed newly published academic articles and findings about employee turnover retention strategies throughout the data collection and analysis process.

Reliability and Validity

A key difference between quantitative and qualitative research is how reliability and validity are conceptualized, applied, and understood, although both methodologies require transparency and ways to demonstrate their trustworthiness (Hayashi et al., 2021). The analogous criteria for qualitative studies are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Forero et al., 2018). These criteria are not measurable and need to be established using qualitative methods, such as member checking and triangulation (Nilmanat & Kurniawan, 2021). Qualitative research is more trustworthy and valid when the tools, processes, and data are appropriate for the research (Fàbregues & Fetters 2019). This qualitative research pertained to gaining an in-depth understanding of experiences and perspectives from a relatively small sample of individuals from a narrow population, with data collected and analyzed in a nonstatistical manner, leading to nongeneralizable yet contextualized trustworthy results.

Dependability

Reliability in quantitative research is similar to dependability in qualitative research (Forero et al., 2018). Reliability stems from the process of demonstrating or explaining how the research is consistent and dependable. Qualitative research is not based on statistics, but on interpretations and specific procedures (Astroth, 2018); therefore, I enhanced dependability with use of member checking of data interpretation, triangulation, interview protocols, and reaching data saturation. Member checking gives the interviewer the opportunity to present a summary of the information to the interviewee to check for accuracy and insight (Yang et al., 2018).

The concept of data saturation is a guide for determining the adequacy of data and sample size (Hennink et al., 2019). Rather than statistically determining a minimum sample size (as in quantitative research), qualitative research involves the ability to discern the saturation of data (Renjith et al., 2021). Data saturation is when no new data appears to emerge from additional data collection efforts (Saunders et al., 2018). Data saturation is reached once data become replicative and further data collection is unnecessary (Fofana et al., 2020). The number of participants needed for data saturation varies from one study to another (Hennink et al., 2019). I interviewed five call center leaders to reach data saturation. If data saturation was not reached, I would have conducted more interviews with call center leaders until data saturation was reached.

Triangulation involves multiple sources, methods, theoretical perspectives, and/or research (Forero et al., 2018). Triangulation increases consistency, integrity, validity, and confirmability in studies (Fusch et al., 2018). The interview protocol is a practical guide to conduct the interview (Rashid et al., 2019). While these techniques help to ensure trustworthy findings, the detailed explanations of the steps of the research and the transparency of the data collection protocols enable others to repeat the design, although repeat studies were beyond the scope of this research.

Credibility

Credibility is a standard for trustworthiness (Saunders et al., 2018). Credibility is when the results are believable, especially from the participants' perspectives (Forero et al., 2018). Open-ended questions allow the participant ability to give their perspective without influence from the researcher and the researcher may use follow-up questions or probing questions to keep the interview on task (Fusch et al., 2018). I asked open-ended questions, used member checking, methodological triangulation, and a data collection protocol to enhance credibility. I assured that the participant had the opportunity to review the written summary for accurate interpretation, in a member checking process known to enhance credibility (Nilmanat & Kurniawan, 2021). I encouraged participants to give feedback and make changes. Methodological triangulation from the company documents and the interviews made the research more robust. The interview protocol of open-ended questions helps guide the interview and presents the same questions to all interviewed yet remains flexible to capture additional information of relevance to the study.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the reflection of impartial and unbiased interpretations based on legitimate data reflective of a reality, analyzed without manipulations based on motives and perspectives of the researcher (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I remained aware of my personal influences in all stages of the research without introducing personal biases. Bias should be acknowledged, clarified, and managed (Hayashi et al., 2021). The use of member checking allows the correct interpretations from the participants' perspectives (Nilmanat & Kurniawan, 2021). Participants had the opportunities to correct errors, give feedback, and confirm my correct interpretations. Therefore, member checking enhanced confirmability of the study. Methodological triangulation and the use of the company documents helped enhance the confirmability of findings.

Transferability

Transferability is the ability to apply research results and findings to other contexts or backgrounds (Schloemer & Schröder-Bäck, 2018). I do not ensure trustworthiness. Rather, I provide the readers substantial information about the study, steps, context, and participants for others to make prudent judgements about the appropriate transferability of findings. By providing details about the process of inquiry and description of research context, readers and future researchers can better determine the appropriateness of the transferability of the findings (Munthe-Kaas et al., 2020).

Transition and Summary

Section 2 included the purpose statement, and descriptions of the role of the researcher, participants, population and sampling, method and design, and ethical research steps. Explanations of the research pertained to the data collection instruments, data collection technique, data analysis plan, and trustworthiness of the study (reliability and validity). Section 3 continues with the presentation of the findings, applications to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, and suggestions for further research. The section ends with researcher’s reflections and conclusions.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative single-case study was to explore how airline business call center leaders use retention strategies to successfully alleviate voluntary turnover among customer service representatives. The overarching research question was, What retention strategies do call center leaders use to alleviate voluntary turnover among customer service representatives? The call center leaders responded to seven open-ended questions regarding their retention strategies. Section 3 includes the presentation of findings from the analysis of data collected from five airline business call center leaders. This section also includes information on the field-testing process and descriptions of the research setting and participants in the sample, along with discussion of the data collection and analysis steps taken to ensure the trustworthiness of findings. The interviews and review of documents were the basis for the identification of the five themes discussed in this section. Together, the five major thematic findings answer the overarching research question asked in this study. Section 3 ends with recommendations for further action and research, reflections on my role as the researcher, and the conclusions of the study.

Presentation of the Findings

The following subsections include details about how the research progressed after IRB approval. The steps aligned with those proposed for the research. The sampling process led to the identification of five call center leaders from the airline business who participated in interviews and provided or suggested documents for review. Details about the field testing, the research setting, participants in the sample, and the triangulation of data leading to thematic qualitative data analysis follow. Company and population descriptions also contextualize the research for readers who may be interested in the transferability of findings. The thick descriptions of the research setting, sample of the defined population, and research steps may enable other researchers to make judgments about the transferability of findings, which also depends on the details design, methodology, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the research effort.

Field Testing

Field testing occurred prior to the interviews with the participants in the sample. The field testing involved testing the audio-recording devices and practicing interviewing techniques. Any data collected during field testing was not a part of the main study data, and practice interviews were with individuals who were not a part of the main study sample. I field tested the interview questions by inviting four research and field experts to evaluate the interview questions and data collection protocol proposed and approved for this study. The research experts were my committee members and an independent research consultant; all four experts had completed their own doctorate degrees and had practical qualitative research knowledge and experience.

Improvements of the data collection protocol included refinement of the interview questions to add clarity, such as ensuring that questions pertained to voluntary turnover. I also revised the question order to improve the flow of the interview process. I also elicited suggestions for documents for review. Additional modifications from field testing included improving on the audio recording file format, to ensure audible recording of interviews that could be confidential and securely stored as m4a electronic files. Inviting and addressing expert feedback, practicing the interview process, and ensuring the optimal recordings of data were steps that I took to enhance the credibility of data collection.

Research Setting

The setting for the research was a major airline business, with main offices located in Texas and a global service area. The chosen call center included employees who worked mostly from home following the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. I recruited participants through social media, beginning with the use of LinkedIn and Indeed websites, as well as Facebook and Instagram, as these platforms were utilized by call center leaders of the business. I solicited call center managers by posting invitations for leaders to participate, then sent interested parties an email introduction to the study with an informed consent form attached. After obtaining informed consent, I set up interviews through the Zoom conferencing platform.

Demographics

Five call center leaders (four women and one man) who had successfully implemented retention strategies for call center representatives in a Texas airline business participated in this study. I used criterion-based purposeful sampling of call center leaders from this population of Texas airlines business employees to recruit these five information-rich call center leaders. Eligibility verification was through the self-report of participants that they were call center leaders who had worked in call center management between 2005 and 2022 and were over 18 years of age. The range in work experience as leaders of the airline business call center was from 3 years to 12 years. The study participants described successfully implementing retention strategies for call center representatives of the Texas airline business.

Data Collection

After obtaining informed consent, I conducted interviews via the Zoom conferencing platform. Using the interview and data collection protocol facilitated a consistent data collection effort, which I believe helped to minimize bias and provide a systematic research process. Interviews ranged in duration from 20 to 45 minutes. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, which helped to provide confirmation of data saturation and supported the member checking process. Interviewing a sample size of five call center leaders in Texas airline business call centers led to the data saturation necessary for the study. The repetitiveness of participant responses provided evidence of data saturation, which was confirmed through the member checking process. To ensure confidentiality, I gave each participant an alphanumeric pseudonym of P1, P2, P3, P4 and P5.

During member checking, participants received a summary of the initial interpretations of data, comprised of five major themes. The member checking process included an invitation for participants to add to the data, refute the initial interpretations, or clarify reported findings. All five participants completed the member checking process and confirmed that the initial interpretations of the data well represented their expressed and shared experiences.

Data collection also occurred the review of related documents. During each interview, I requested recommendations on company documents that could corroborate or demonstrate the retention strategies and leadership experiences discussed by participants in the study. Job postings, job descriptions, employee handbooks, staff training manuals, operating procedures, newsletters, and awards were among the documents reviewed for the study.

The transcriptions of audio-recorded interviews led to verbatim textual data, and the notes taken from the review of documents enabled the triangulation of data. Transcriptions of the interview data and notes from the document reviews resulted in 38 double-spaced, typed pages of textual data collected from the five participants in the study sample. During the transcriptions of the recorded interviews, data saturation started to become obvious when the answers given by each subsequent participant began to become repetitive and similar strategies and accounts started to emerge. Attention to data saturation, the use of member checking, and the triangulation of multiple sources of data helped to enhance to trustworthiness of the study.

Data Analysis

The analysis model consisted of the five-step analysis procedure as described by Yin (2017): compiling the data, deconstructing the data, reassembling the data, interpreting the data, and drawing conclusions from the data. I applied the five steps in a search for the five major themes that emerged from the data. Member checking followed the initial interpretations of data and helped to confirm data saturation and enhanced the trustworthiness of findings. Following member checking, I continued the search for themes in an iterative process, following the five-step procedures.

Triangulation increased the sources of data and trustworthiness of findings. Use of methodological triangulation included the collection of data from semistructured interviews and the review of documents, which led to the thematic findings in this study. During analysis, I was attentive to how the multiple diverse sources of data converged and diverged throughout the thematic analysis process. The overall findings converged with little divergence from one data source to another.

Much of the data analysis process required attention to listening to the audio recordings, reading and rereading transcriptions, and drawing conclusions from the data. Software used for data organization and analysis included electronic audio files, word processing programs used for transcribing the audio files, and the qualitative software NVivo 11 Plus for additional sorting and coding of data. The software was helpful for organization, storage, sorting, and coding of data, but it did not replace the thoughtful reflection on the wholeness and discernment of noticeable patterns within the data that emerged after repeated reviews.

Throughout the data analysis process, which involved compiling the data, deconstructing the data, reassembling the data, interpreting data, and drawing conclusions, I was cognizant of the patterns in the data that emerged as major themes. I also recognized how those emergent themes pertained to the conceptual framework and overarching research question. The key themes that emerged are further discussed and interpreted in light of the peer-reviewed literature and the job embeddedness theory.

Major Thematic Findings

Five major themes emerged from the process of analyzing the interview and document data. The five major themes revolved around the concepts of (a) optimal employee-organizational job fit, (b) opportunities for upward and lateral mobility, (c) leadership support for employee engagement, (d) individualized personal and professional communication, and (e) and flexibility to accommodate work-life balance. The following subsections include explanations about each of the five major themes, supported by verbatim examples from the data that best illustrate each thematic finding.

Theme 1: Optimal Employee-Organizational Job Fit

Participants expressed that one of the primary ways to reduce voluntary turnover is an acceptable job fit. Candidates should understand the nature, challenges, and requirements of the position. Participants expressed the common experience that oftentimes candidates were so concerned with getting the job that they did not take the appropriate steps to understand the job. Similarly, there was an expressed consensus among participants that human resources and company leaders should take all steps possible to ensure that candidates understand their roles, responsibilities, and requirements of the position. With such understanding, there is a greater likelihood that candidates are prepared to accept the challenges of the requirements of their positions. Table 2 includes excerpts from the data pertaining to job fit.

Table 2

Theme 1: Job Fit Data Excerpts

Participant	Quotation

1	It is just understanding the role. The interview process is quick and people may do anything to get a job and then realize this is more than they wanted to do. …While we paint the picture in the interview process, I am not sure they grasp it… I don't think it connects until they're on the job. Have a team leader in the interview to make it clear it's not a 9 to 5 operation so if that's what you're looking for this is not the work for you.
2	A lot of people come in thinking they're like a receptionist but then realize it's like 8 hours of calls, nonstop, repetitive work, sitting, and being tied to the computer - some people just don't want to do that…On my team, I try to help them see the big picture… help them understand that no job is perfect but that the benefits can outweigh the bad parts so you don't want to leave.
3	Companies need to do a better job of making sure that person is a good fit for the company… tell it like it is… do a better job of letting them know what they are legitimately getting into.
4	Allow an understanding of the role… they are not as flexible as they should be.
5	They may think it'll be easy and then when they get here and realize what it is really like that is one reason for voluntary turnover... This call center is not just for everybody – it's not for the weak.

Table 3 includes the subthemes pertaining to job fit. Aspects of the job that participants described as especially important to understand included mandatory overtime. The hours of operation were among the most challenging aspects of the job that candidates mentioned. Because call center representatives are expected to answer telephones over a 24-hour period, 7 days a week, candidates for the positions should understand the possibility of being scheduled at different times throughout the days or nights. Mandatory overtime is also a subtheme of job fit. Candidates for the position may not understand the expectations of their roles and that they will be assigned mandatory overtime if there are no volunteers for regular overtime. These are aspects of the job that could become clear throughout the application and interview process, to reduce the possibilities that new hires would be discontent with the conditions of the job.

Table 3

Subthemes Pertaining to Job Fit

Subtheme	No. of participants	No. of references
Hours of operation	5	32
Understanding roles	5	12
Mandatory overtime	5	7
Interviewing process	5	6

Job fit is a part of the job embeddedness theory. With the introduction of the job embeddedness theory, Mitchell et al. (2001) focused on job fit as a degree of compatibility between self and work, within the organization and amidst the work environment. According to Shehawy et al. (2018), the positive outcome of an optimal job fit is a higher retention rate, which is consistent with what all the participants in the study described as a phenomenon that occurred within their airline call center. With a good understanding of the role and requirements of the job, which are consistent with personal goals and preferences, an employee is more likely to become embedded in their job and committed to the organization with intentions to stay with the organization (Shehawy et al., 2018).

The overall concept of job fit is how compatible the employee's capabilities are with the organization and work environment (Chan et al., 2019; Dechawatanapaisal, 2018b; Porter et al., 2019), which participants in this study indicated was a key to reducing voluntary turnover. The focus of the participants was on a fit with work requirements as well as conditions, cultures, and relationships. Certain job characteristics, such as security and flexibility, can affect job fit; according to Chen (2019) and the participants in this study, these aspects should align with employees' preferences and needs. There was an expressed consensus among participants in this study, which was consistent with prior research reports, that employees are likely able to better adapt to new job requirements easier when their skillset, goals, and outlooks align with the job and organizational culture (Chan et al., 2019; MeiRun et al., 2018).

Theme 2: Opportunities for Upward and Lateral Mobility

Within the company, call center representatives are required to remain in their positions for 1 year, after which time they can pursue other career options. Participants explained that they encouraged employees to stay in their positions for at least 1 year and that the opportunities to move within the company helped to reduce voluntary turnover. There was a shared opinion among participants in the sample that the call center representative position was not designed as a permanent position. Instead of turnover where employees leave the company, there are opportunities for call center representatives to move within the company. Table 4 includes excerpts from the data pertaining to mobility.

Table 4

Theme 2: Mobility Data Excerpts

Participant	Quotation
1	They may know the role is not for them. Our career mobility center and what they have to offer is a benefit. It is guiding them and supporting them to stick with it. If they can hold on for a year, they can see what opportunities they want to try for something different.
2	On my team, I try to help them see the big picture, the benefits they will have if they can stick it out… I understand you don't love this job but if you do a year's time, then you can do whatever you want to do… Most people come in just to get their foot in door… but for others this is a retirement job – they don't want to go anywhere else. I have new hires that are happy where they're at.

3	Focus on what their strengths are and try to get them thinking about moving around in the company… have them see opportunities where they don't have to quit altogether… come in and get their foot in the door and then build on that to stay with the company…you want them to start out on the phones, see what they like and where they fit it.
4	Reps want to move to different departments … They may need an accommodation so they can be more flexible in their role. Work with your people… Move around.
5	The more you do this - repetition - you'll get your own flow and you'll be just fine. Keep yourself ready and if the opportunity presents itself you can move up.

Several subthemes culminating in the major thematic finding of mobility are shown in Table 5. There was a repeated emphasis of participants on call center representatives' opportunities to move around and within the company after 1 year. The shared sentiment of participants was that if the call center representative could stick with the entry-level position for 1 year, then they could have many choices within the company. Some of the leaders in the study mentioned encouraging call center representatives to get to know the company and stay aware of other opportunities that could be attractive to them, as a way to stay motivated in their positions. If employees were able to remain in their position for a year, they could pursue a different opportunity in the organization.

Table 5

Subthemes Pertaining to Mobility

Subtheme	No. of participants	No. of references
One year	5	12
Move around/within	5	12
Stick it out/stick with it	5	9
Try something different	5	6

According to Porter et al. (2019), on-the-job stimuli are beneficial to the company because of the direct ties to the company and participants cited ties to the company as a means toward employee retention. One of the ties to the job are opportunities for advancement and promotions, otherwise described as mobility. The concept of acquiring pertains to the different things the company has to offer, like promotions, increases in pay, and authority (Cakir & Kozak, 2017), which participants in this study cited as incentives that reduce voluntary turnover.

The job embeddedness theory also accounted for the sacrifice employees would make when leaving their positions or company (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018b). Participants in this study described the opportunity to secure mobility within the company as something call center representatives would sacrifice when employees voluntarily leave the company. The different projects, perks, and benefits within the job typically are subjects of great consideration when deciding to leave an organization (Hussain & Deery, 2018; Porter et al., 2019), and are among the cited strategies that participants in this study would emphasize with their employees as a way to retain their call center representatives. The supervisor's ability to incentivize and promote an employees' motivation helps to reduce turnover (Al-Qathmi & Zedan, 2021). One way to motivate employees, according to the call center leaders in this study, was to emphasize the opportunities and benefits in the company that would follow their minimum time investment in the call center representative position.

Theme 3: Leadership Support for Employee Engagement

Participants in the study described engagement as a key strategy to supporting employees which helped to reduce voluntary turnover. Engagement was described by the participants in the sample as involving employees in training, coaching, mentoring, and social opportunities. Table 6 includes excerpts from the data pertaining to engagement.

Table 6

Theme 3: Engagement Data Excerpts

Participant	Quotation
1	Engagement and connection with our reps is important… Some new hires are not getting any interaction with their leaders and that really clearly contributed to them being disengaged and not feeling needed or wanted or have the support they need to succeed… we want to be sure we are meeting with them every week and we are starting to develop mentor support from their leaders to make sure they have the support they need from the start.
2	I think there is a disconnect when they don't feel like their team is engaged with them. The majority of the leaders meet with new hires at least once a week... Now that we are virtual it is even more important to keep them engaged and let them know I'm there… since they are not in the same building, it is even more important that leaders show presence and are engaged.
3	Leaders need to build engagement for our teams…Everyone wants to feel like they are part of the team.
4	Work with your people…Monthly coaching sessions… training sessions. Help them out – send their requests to scheduling and you can get things fixed.
5	You have to meet reps where they are… Whatever approach works best to set them up for success is where I meet them. Look at reps as individuals not just a number.

Engagement meant leaders were active in developing relationships with employees. This engagement, according to participants, reflected an interest in employees, their experiences, growth, and well-being. Table 7 includes the related subthemes that comprised the major thematic finding.

Table 7

Subthemes Pertaining to Engagement

Subtheme	No. of participants	No. of references
Engage(ment)	5	15
Training	5	7
Coaching	5	6
Mentoring	5	6

Employees become more engaged when feeling safe within the organization (Al-Qathmi & Zedan, 2021), which is what the participants in this study emphasized as important in reducing voluntary turnover. The more engaged and safer an employee feels the more likely they may be to commit to longevity with the organization. The call center leaders in this study shared similar sentiments as bake (2019) and Dwesini (2019) that employee engagement is essential for reduced turnover intentions. Employee feels valued when there are supportive resources in addition to job development (Valle et al., 2017), which is what participants in this study stressed as important for engagement. Developing relationships and learning what the employees want and need to be successful helps the employer strategically invest in their employees for long-term employment through engagement (Al-Qathmi & Zedan, 2021). Participants in this study believed that building relationships through engagement was a successful employee retention strategy, while a lack of attention to relationships lead to a lack of engagement, which Li et al. (2021) claimed could diminish one's sense of value in the workplace.

Job Embeddedness theory also encompassed links, which are employee's actual connections within the workplace and with people (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018a; Mitchell et al 2001; Porter et al. 2019; Holtom et al., 2006). Engaging helps to bind workers to an organization (Hussain & Deery, 2018; Coetzer et al., 2019). According to participants in this study, workplace coaching between the employees and management can effectively enhance employee engagement, which is consistent with the tenets of job embeddedness (Bozer & Jones, 2018).

Theme 4: Individualized Personal and Professional Communication

Participants in the study described communication with employees as a main way to help reduce voluntary turnover. This communication helped foster engagement. Communication is also an important avenue toward enabling a caring culture. Communication not only pertained to job-related matters, but also was useful in developing relationships and expressing interests in employees' lives. Expressing interest in employees' lives imparted a sense of understanding and personal support for employees that cultivated a sense of belonging that helped to reduce voluntary turnover. Table 8 includes excerpts from the data pertaining to communication.

Table 8

Theme 4: Communication Data Excerpts

Participant	Quotation
1	Just making sure you stay connected with leadership and that they can come to their leaders with whatever concerns they have – you can let it out – and not forgetting why we're here – if you want to keep your people you have to have a connection – so employees can come to leaders and figure out whatever it is that can help.
2	We have these little appreciation emails you can send …we're very complimentary if you're doing a good job on stuff. If there's something

	serious that needs to happen then we need to focus on that and set goals … They need to feel loved, important and that they're not just someone else coming down the line… Giving them support and positive reinforcement works better than the negative.
3	Just that communication with them is something they really appreciate… having a connection… Not having a relationship plays a big part in not wanting to be there anymore. I feel like the relationship is important that we as leaders need to build.
4	You have to know what you can do to alleviate stress. Getting to know your people before something happens. Anything I can do as a leader to help them.
5	You have to be mindful, really talking with them and finding out what's going on, treating them like a human being rather than a number.

The subthemes that comprised this major thematic finding are summarized in Table 9. This communication helped foster engagement and was a recognized facilitator of a connected and caring culture. Communication was the key strategy for developing relationships. Interest in the call center representatives' lives involved the aim of expressing understanding and displaying personal support that fostered the sense of belonging that helped to reduce voluntary turnover. Table 9 includes excerpts from the data pertaining to communication.

Table 9

Subthemes Pertaining to Communication

Subtheme	No. of participants	No. of references
Talking/meeting	5	15
Connect(ion)	5	10
Relationship	5	9
Personal support	5	6
Expressing interest	5	5

According to Bake (2019) and the participants in this study, employees should have the ability to freely speak by having open communication with management without being intimidated or fearful of retaliations (Bake, 2019). Positive links, a part of the job embeddedness theory, include good connections and communication between management, nonmanagement, and fellow colleagues (Chan et al., 2019; MeiRun et al., 2018). Low interactional connections between employees and lower management may stem from communication difficulties or employees' fears (Tan et al., 2019), which call center leaders in this study felt were important to address to help reduce voluntary turnover. When employees do have solid relationships or links with invested and communicative leaders, there is a positive effect on employees and job embeddedness (Zhou et al., 2020), which were among the expressed strategies for reducing employee turnover in this study.

One of the reasons cited by participants for strong and meaningful communication revolved around the concept of employee empowerment. Empowerment increases embeddedness (Dwesini, 2019), and according to participants could be encouraged through communication that included coaching, mentoring, rewards, and reinforcements. Empowering frontline employees can occur through building their expertise and knowledge and encouraging their inquiry into ways to improve customer service because they must communicate with the customers on a daily basis (Zito et al., 2018). According to the call center leaders in this study, positive, proactive, and responsive communication is necessary for empowering, building, encouraging, and supporting call center representatives' interactions with customers while emphasizing the value of their input within the organization.

Theme 5: Flexibility to Accommodate Work-Life Balance

Participants in the study expressed a lack of flexibility as a challenge in the call center representative role. There was a shared sentiment that more flexibility in the position could help to reduce voluntary turnover. This flexibility pertained to a better work-life balance, more control over scheduling options, and less regimented requirements, such as mandatory overtime and accommodations for emergencies and family needs. There was an expressed belief that if the call center leaders had more opportunities to provide flexibility, then call center representatives would have an easier time balancing their work-life challenges, which could represent an additional strategy to reduce call center representative voluntary turnover. Flexibility is one area that leaders felt was most difficult to address because they were not in control of the company's scheduling and work policies. Accordingly, call center leaders adhered to strict policies characterized by a lack of flexibility. Table 10 includes excerpts from the data pertaining to flexibility.

Table 10

Theme 5: Flexibility Data Excerpts

Participant	Quotation
1	There is not always that work life balance that people like to have.
2	Some new hires say that others are not getting the support they need and they need to tell their leader …they need more flexibility… but sometimes people are very intimidated… people who are the newest are learning the company, the culture, the job and they need the most support.
3	Just making sure members of my team are okay… making sure they're okay at home and at work. Making sure their schedules are okay and that I'm here for you not only as a supervisor but as a friend.
4	They may need an accommodation so they can be more flexible in their role. They love what I can do to be flexible but they wish I could do

	more. Anything I can do as a leader to help them and make the workplace more flexible.
5	The regimented environment doesn’t stop life from happening. Recognize that life happens and let’s work through those things.

Subthemes pertaining to flexibility included a lack of flexibility and a need for flexibility, as shown in Table 11. This flexibility pertained largely to scheduling and policies. The desire for greater flexibility was to be able to demonstrate a greater commitment to employees’ personal needs, including family responsibilities. According to participants in the study, the company policies could be structured to better accommodate employees’ personal needs. However, because of the nature of the work, including 24 hour a day, 7 days a week scheduling, as well as mandatory overtime requirements, there were limited opportunities for leaders to accommodate employees’ needs for flexibility. This aspect of the job was one of the major reasons cited for voluntary turnover.

Table 11

Subthemes Pertaining to Flexibility

Subtheme	No. of participants	No. of references
Flexibility	5	16
Scheduling/policies	5	10
Work-life balance	5	7

According to Dhanpat et al. (2018) and participants in this study, employees want a variety of options than just career development and typically desire flexibility in a variety of ways that benefit them. The call center leaders in this study described a work-life balance that could be an important determinant of turnover, which aligns with previous findings that employees typically want work and life balance options (Dwesini, 2019). An employee's work-life balance is conducive when it increases their quality and value within the company (Lim et al., 2021), yet call center leaders described a lack of flexibility as a problem that some call center representatives may not be able to overcome.

Certain job characteristics like job security and flexibility increases productivity and retention, especially when they align with employees' preferences and needs (Chen, 2019). While call center leaders expressed this knowledge and awareness and shared ways they tried to be as flexible as possible, they did express the need for the company to better address flexibility options. The lack of flexibility ties back into employee fit, whereby prospective employees should be aware of their personal values, needs, and abilities, to be aware of how to align best with company cultures, customers, and other employees (Afsar & Badir, 2016).

Application to Professional Practice

Applications to professional practice include the availability of research-driven findings to support airlines employees and call center leaders. These findings help to offer expanded knowledge about the human resource challenges pertaining to airlines business call centers and the challenges and strategies surrounding employee turnover. A positive outcome of the research can be the application of the findings by call center leaders who may be struggling to apply more effective strategies to support the call center representatives and retain a satisfied staff.

Individuals contemplating becoming call center representatives may be attentive to the published knowledge about the benefits and challenges of those experiences. Call center leaders can use the knowledge gained by these types of studies to prepare themselves and their representatives for optimal job fits to their positions. Finding from this study suggest that call center leaders should prepare to devote time to developing relationships and utilizing communication favorably to engage employees, while also providing for flexibility in all ways possible. Researching and studying businesses in context with the purpose of supporting the success of the organizations and employees contributed to positive developments in professional practice and potentially advantageous approaches to successful employee retention and business growth.

Implications for Social Change

The implication for positive social change includes improved retention strategies, which if applied could help to increase employee morale, job security, value, and self-esteem of individuals. The culture of call center representative organizations could improve due to lower turnover, increased quality of customer service, improvement in engagement and communication, and job flexibility. Successful strategies to reduce employee turnover could help improve operations, optimize productivity, enhance work conditions, lead to organizational growth and competitive advantages, increase profits, support employment opportunities, decrease unemployment rate, stabilize the workforce, and enhance customer service, which may strengthen the local communities and promote a positive image towards customers and employees.

The success of the airlines business call centers is of significant social value and affects society because the airline industry constitutes a large portion of support to the global economy. Implications of this study for positive social change pertain to the potential for airlines call center leaders to improve employee retention to grow and support the airline industry as well as the employees who contribute to the communities in which they live. More successful call center retention can help to sustain employment and economic prosperity, leading to higher individual and company productivity and taxation revenues. The improved retention strategies that could sustain businesses could lead to the revenues required to foster innovations that lead to even more job creation and social benefits. The findings from this study add to the literature about employee retention strategies in general, applying theory to new knowledge to inform business leaders, scholars, and educators about improvements in business and employment processes.

Recommendations for Action

Recommendations for airline call center business leaders stem from the results of this study, including more attention of business leaders to research-based strategies that can enhance organizational success. Plans for dissemination of the research results include submissions to peer-reviewed publications, conference presentations, and sharing findings with call center leaders and airline managers through social media and related business association resources. It was apparent from this study that leaders want to learn and apply strategies to retain their employees, which based on the findings from this study, can include attention to the five major themes of (a) optimal employee-organizational job fit; (b) opportunities for upward and lateral mobility; (c) leadership support for employee engagement; (d) individualized personal and professional communication; (e) and flexibility to accommodate work-life balance.

Recommendations include leadership focus on research-based strategies that can be applied in the most productive and beneficial ways. Based on the major themes that emerged from the data, call center leaders can consider how engagement and communication could benefit them in their efforts to retain and support call center representative employees. Airline call center leaders can be attentive to how their own actions and behaviors affect their applied strategies and employees. Strong communication skills are necessary for successful employee retention due to its role in relationship building and employee engagement, according to participants in this study. Accordingly, call center and airlines business leaders should regularly and continuously assess and improve their employee-related communication skills. Leaders should continue to engage in ways to build trustful, engaging, and empowering professional and personal relationships that can enhance the likelihood of reducing voluntary employee turnover.

Call center representatives impact airlines business reputations and overall organizational performance. According to participants, there are ongoing efforts to enhance employees' skills, attitudes, training, and experience to build commitment to the organization through trust in leadership. Emphasis on mentoring, training, coaching, and personal support are strategies to improve the quality of employees' experiences and reduce voluntary turnover. Continuous assessment of employee policies, retention strategies, and job requirements are recommendations for call center and airline business leaders, to reduce voluntary turnover and improve overall employee and business performance.

Recommendations for Further Research

Recommendations for further research are based on the five major themes and the limitations of this research. For example, much research has occurred with respect to employee engagement, and communication. However, participants in this study did express that not all their employees responded in the same ways to efforts to engage and build relationships. Engagement and relationship building from call center employees' perspectives could be further enlightening.

Additional research could pertain to employees' and leaders' experiences with job fit, as there was some question expressed by participants in this study about the extent to which job candidates were aware of the importance of job fit considerations. In this company, there was an emphasis on mobility within the company. Accordingly, the opportunity to advance or move within and across the company was a cited strategy for reduced employee turnover. The extent to which job mobility impacted employee retention and reduced turnover was unknown, which could be an area of future research.

There was a lack of opportunity for call center leaders to better influence job flexibility, which could be an area of future research focus. Flexibility pertained to the impact of hours, schedules, mandatory overtime, and work location, which could be related to work-life balance, but the extent to which these factors impacted actual turnover in call centers was not the focus of this study and would be appropriate for future research.

Finally, qualitative research has limitations to the generalizability of findings, and in this study the sample was narrow in scope to a geographically defined airline call center field. Further qualitative research of other airlines, geographies, call center set-ups (home verses office based) could lead to different findings. Accordingly, findings from this study may not be transferable to other contexts and future research could be appropriate in those cases.

Reflections

Designing and completing this qualitative research study culminated in the development of new skills and an appreciation of the requirements and challenges of the academic and scholarly research process. Consideration of different theories in the research arena required comprehensive reviews of the literature and reflections on those findings. The completion of the study and the identification of the emergent themes led to further insights about the outcomes of research and applications to business processes. The extent to which the participants in the study expressed leadership terms and appeared to share textbook business knowledge was impressive, and indicative that leaders are being attentive to research and published knowledge. Being attentive to possible sources of bias, engaging in ethical pursuits with the application to and approval of the Institutional Review Board, and documenting the details of doctorate-level research process heightened respect for and ability to conduct scholarly research. The doctoral process helped me grow in patience, perseverance, reflexivity, diplomacy, and competency as I developed and applied my research skills.

Conclusion

Included in this section was the results of the research process. The presentation, discussions, and interpretations of findings led to recommendations for leaders and suggestions for future research. Five major themes emerged from the process of analyzing the interview and document data pertaining to (a) optimal employee-organizational job fit; (b) opportunities for upward and lateral mobility; (c) leadership support for employee engagement; (d) individualized personal and professional communication; and (e) and flexibility to accommodate work-life balance. Findings from this study well aligned with the job embeddedness theory that encompassed job fit, links, and sacrifices as major ways that employees connect to and remain in with their companies or positions.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol and Questions

1. Solicit call center leaders via email to ask to them to participate in this study and to voluntarily consent to the terms of participation as described in the informed consent form attached to those emails.
2. Set up an appointment for a Zoom-based semistructured interview using the emails provided to set up the meeting links.
3. Conduct interviews by Zoom.
    a. Advise participants that the interview should take approximately 45 minutes.
    b. Go over informed consent contents and answer any questions and concerns of participant.
    c. Advise participant of their confidentiality. Introduce participant(s) with pseudonym and coded identification; note the date and time.
    d. Ask permission to turn on the audio recording device.
    e. Begin interview with Question 1; follow through to the final question.
    f. Ask for and discuss any recommended documents with participant.
    g. Discuss member checking with participant.
    h. Verbally thank each participant for their part in the study
4. Collect documents:

    Name___________ Purpose___________

    Relevant Data

    ____

    ____

Appendix B: Letter of Invitation

Research Study Seeks Participants

There is a new study called "Retention Strategies for Call Center Representatives in an Airline Industry" that could help leaders better understand retention strategies that call center leaders use to alleviate customer service representative turnover in the Texas airline industry. For this study, you are invited to describe your own experiences with implementing retention strategies by answering questions in a confidential interview and providing documents that could illustrate your successful retention strategies. The interview is part of the data collection for the doctoral study by Lisa Lott, a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) candidate at Walden University.

<u>About the study:</u>

- One audio-recorded 45-minute interview via Zoom.
- Provide or recommend related documents pertaining to your successful retention strategies.
- Review of a summary of the initial interpretations of the data collected from the interview.
- To protect your privacy, you will be assigned a pseudonym instead of using your name.

<u>Volunteers must meet these requirements:</u>

- 18 years old or older
- call center leaders who have worked in call center management between 2005 and 2022.

- call center leaders who successfully implement or implemented retention strategies for call center representatives located in a Texas airline business.

Attached is an informed consent form that details the terms of participation. If you would like to ask questions about participation or about your right, responsibilities, risks, benefits, and terms of your voluntary participation as explained on the informed consent form, please contact me at [telephone number redacted] or reply to this email at [email address redacted].