

2023

## Reducing Employee Turnover in the Fast-Food Industry Through Leadership Strategies

Terrell Brown  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

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Terrell Brown

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Walden University  
2023

Abstract

Reducing Employee Turnover in the Fast-Food Industry Through Leadership Strategies

by

Terrell Brown

MBA, Post University, 2017

BS, Post University, 2015

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

Walden University

April 2023

## Abstract

Some fast-food industry managers lack leadership strategies to reduce employee turnover rates. Fast-food industry managers are concerned with high employee turnover that leads to increased costs of recruitment and decreased productivity. Grounded in servant leadership theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore leadership strategies used by fast-food industry managers to reduce employee turnover rates. The participants consisted of five fast-food industry managers in the Midwest region of the United States. Data were collected through semistructured interviews and a review of company documents. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data; three themes emerged: a value-based leadership approach, facilitating effective communication, and enabling positive culture and a family-like work environment. A key recommendation is for fast food industry managers to lead by example and act as role models. The implications for positive social change include the potential to reduce unemployment rates, enhance employees' livelihood, and advance local communities' socioeconomic conditions through the mitigation of high turnover rates.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this study to my wife, Charmelle Monique Renaee Brown. Thank you for loving me, staying by my side, and pushing me to get to the finish line. I will be sure to support you when you pursue your PhD. Secondly, I dedicate this to my three wonderful children, Trinity, Tristan, and Tria, who motivate and inspire me daily. Lastly, I dedicate this to my first teacher, my mom, Pamela. You have been a lifelong educator and my inspiration for lifelong learning. You made me proud when you achieved your second master's degree. I hope that I have done you proud.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

### **Background of the Problem**

Turnover is a complex issue that all leaders encounter that can cause detrimental effects in various areas of an organization internally and externally. Employee turnover is an ongoing challenge that business leaders face in a multitude of organizations (Basnyat & Clarence Lao, 2020). Siyanbola and Gilman (2017) implied that employee turnover creates a progressive dilemma in businesses that may lead to vulnerability in an organization's foundation and ability to reduce costs. Organizations are left to mitigate the negative effects that turnover has on overall performance, while also dealing with the strain that excessive turnover has on current employees. Employees are vital to an organization, and consequentially, their decision to stay or leave is interrelated with organizational performance (Kim et al., 2017). The reduced performance of employees and the organization results in undesirable productivity and costs. Skelton et al. (2019) stated that employee turnover negatively affects an organization's profitability due to recruitment costs and decreases employee performance because of inadequate staffing. Skelton et al. further explained that turnover also negatively impacts communities because of a loss of payroll taxes and fiscal limitations on social contributions. The negative effects of turnover cost employees time and energy who attempt to maintain performance, increases hiring costs of organizations, and degrades the economic growth of communities. Leaders, especially those in industries who experience excessive employee turnover rates, should use employee strategies to mitigate turnover to avoid the adverse results of employee turnover.

High employee turnover is more prominent in fast-food industry organizations and has remained exceedingly problematic. Malek et al. (2018) reported that employee turnover is twice as high in the hospitality industry, which includes the fast-food industry, compared to others. High turnover rates in the fast-food industry's workforce hinder industry organizations' productivity (Taşpınar & Türkmen, 2019). This results in an organizational climate of employees who constantly endure understaffed work environments and who may themselves have increased turnover intentions. Adnan et al. (2018) identified that even with ongoing research, employee turnover within the fast-food industry remains climacteric. Continuous research on employee turnover is essential to provide fast-food industry managers with knowledge that could enable them to develop advanced strategies for mitigating high employee turnover in their organization.

### **Problem Statement**

Employee turnover in the fast-food industry is a crucial issue that negatively affects fast-food industry organizations' performance globally (Kashif et al., 2017). In 2018, the total voluntary and involuntary employee turnover in the United States reached 40.1 million. In the accommodation and food services industry, turnover reached a historical high, accounting for 7.6 million of those employee separations (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). The general business problem is that the absence of effective leadership strategies of fast-food industry managers leads to high employee turnover, which reduces profitability. The specific business problem is that some fast-food industry managers lack leadership strategies to reduce employee turnover rates.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore leadership strategies used by some fast-food industry managers to reduce employee turnover rates. The targeted population consisted of five fast-food industry managers of five different organizations, located in the Midwest United States, who effectively applied leadership strategies to reduce high employee turnover rates. The results of this study may contribute to social change by improving the economic stability of organizations in the fast-food industry that reduce food service unemployment rates and advancing organizational growth, enabling organizations to improve the socioeconomic condition of the local community.

### **Nature of the Study**

Researchers use the qualitative method to interpret a phenomenon by understanding it through a subjective view (Saunders et al., 2015; Yin, 2017). Researchers use the quantitative methodology to analyze particular constructs through numerical and statistical data (Saunders et al., 2015). Researchers use the mixed method to use both quantitative and qualitative approaches to research (Saunders et al., 2015). Qualitative methodology was used in this study to explore answers to open-ended questions from fast-food industry managers about their leadership strategies to reduce employee turnover rates. Qualitative methodology was more appropriate than quantitative methodology for this study because the experiences of participants in this study were explored, rather than examining the relationship between variables and testing hypotheses as researchers do in quantitative and mixed methods.

A qualitative multiple case study design was used in this study because I explored the perspectives of more than one case. Researchers use case design in qualitative research to interpret answers to questions that they cannot manipulate while exploring phenomena at the existing state (Saunders et al., 2015; Yin, 2017). Researchers use multiple case study to explore data from multiple cases, whereas in a single case study, the researcher explores one case. Researchers use the ethnographic design to interpret a phenomenon based on societal customs and heritage (Saunders et al., 2015). Ethnographic design was not appropriate because I did not explore the organizations' cultural elements. The phenomenological design is used to explore the real-life experiences of a shared group (Vishnevsky & Beanlands, 2004). The phenomenological design was not appropriate because I explored strategies that managers employed and not the in-depth personal meanings of managers' experiences with a phenomenon. Researchers use the narrative design to gather participant data through a meaningful and in-depth account of their life experiences through personal stories (Saunders et al., 2015). The narrative design was not appropriate for this study because individuals' life stories can vary and focus on their personal interpretations rather than the study's purpose.

### **Research Question**

What leadership strategies do fast-food industry managers use to reduce employee turnover rates?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What strategies have you used to reduce employee turnover?

2. How did you assess the effectiveness of the strategies for reducing employee turnover?
3. What strategies did you find worked best to reduce employee turnover?
4. What strategies were least effective in reducing employee turnover?
5. What were the significant barriers to implementing strategies for reducing employee turnover?
6. How did you address the significant barriers to reducing employee turnover?
7. What else would you like to share regarding strategies for reducing employee turnover that we have not addressed?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was based on the servant leadership theory. Robert K. Greenleaf created the servant leadership theory founded on the premise of a leader who places the needs of their followers first (Greenleaf, 1977). Servant leadership contrasts with traditional leadership assumptions, in that leaders execute a unique leadership approach of prioritizing their followers' needs (Greenleaf, 1970). Researchers' fascination with servant leadership theory led to the development of several models and constructs related to the theory (Northouse, 2018). Van Dierendonck and Nuijten's (2011) model of servant leadership identified eight underlying concepts: (a) empowerment, (b) humility, (c) standing back, (d) authenticity, (e) forgiveness, (f) courage, (g) accountability, and (h) stewardship. Researchers have explored servant leadership as an approach to develop individuals, to contribute positively to society, and to increase performance in organizations (Kiersch & Peters, 2017). While the appropriate

leadership style varies based upon circumstance, researchers have concluded that exercising servant leadership creates positive organizational results for leaders (Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2017). Fast-food industry managers can reduce employee turnover intentions and influence organizational growth through implementing servant leadership strategies (Hunter et al., 2013). I selected the servant leadership conceptual framework to provide a potential lens for understanding the findings from my study on the strategies that fast-food industry managers use for reducing employee turnover in the Midwest region of the United States. Servant leadership is principled on leaders serving subordinates, which made servant leadership the best choice compared to other leadership theories for this study because service is a primary function in the fast-food industry.

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

#### **Assumptions**

An assumption is a reasonable belief or statement in research but is limited in or has no supporting proof (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). There were three assumptions in this study. The first assumption in this study was that participants were honest and forthcoming when answering interview questions. The second assumption in this study was that participants had breadth of knowledge and experience in handling employee turnover. The third assumption in this study was that strategies for reducing turnover used by fast-food managers are a critical component of fast-food industry organizations.

#### **Limitations**

Limitations are possible weaknesses that impact the results of a study but are uncontrollable by the researcher (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). There were three

limitations in the study. The first limitation was that the participants might not have provided comprehensive answers to the interview questions and the strategies used to reduce employee turnover. The second limitation was that the participants' managerial viewpoints on successful turnover reduction may have varied. The third limitation was the variation of the experience level of participating fast-food industry leaders in reducing turnover.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are restrictions of a study imposed by the researcher in order to limit the purview of research (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). There were three delimitations in this study. The first delimitation was participant delimitation, in that the study only included five fast-food industry managers with evidence of successful strategies for reducing employee turnover. The second delimitation confined the geographical location of fast-food industry leaders to the Midwest United States. The third delimitation was that only strategies for reducing turnover in the fast-food industry were studied.

### **Significance of the Study**

#### **Contribution to Business Practice**

The results of this study may potentially contribute to effective leadership strategies that fast-food industry leaders can use to reduce high employee turnover rates and better understand the negative consequences of high employee turnover. Employee turnover is a business phenomenon that has captivated the attention of business leaders and scholars for over 100 years, which affects a wide range of organizations (Hom et al.,

2017). Employee turnover costs fast-food restaurants approximately \$4,700 per employee separation because of declined productivity, employee recruitment costs, and increased human resource activities (Pollin & Wicks-Lim, 2016). Identifying strategies to prevent negative conditions that evoke employee turnover is crucial to enhance the workplace environment and reduce the cost of losing human resources (Kurniawaty et al., 2019). The results of this study may contribute to business leaders maintaining skillful employees longer for maintaining or improving service quality and workplace conditions, with resulting reductions in the loss of employees and the derivative replacement and training costs of hiring.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The results of this study may contribute to positive social change by providing leaders insight on reducing turnover, which can help increase economic stability. Positive social change occurs when improved conditions for an individual or group are beneficial for organizations and communities (Stephan et al., 2016). Individuals with minimal skills, the elderly, and first-time employees make up the majority of fast-food industry employees (Choi & Joung, 2017) who depend on their jobs for financial stability. The results of this study may contribute to positive social change by providing fast-food industry managers with knowledge on how to engage effectively with employees, which could positively impact the work environment and lives of employees. Reducing employee turnover has the potential to relieve organizational members of the detrimental effects associated with it. Employees can work effectively without the undue stress of position shortages, maintain taxable income that contributes to their community's

socioeconomic status, and contribute to less demanding circumstances allowing for greater community involvement.

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

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that fast-food industry managers use to reduce employee turnover rates and improve profitability. This literature review was focused on leadership strategies used to reduce employee turnover. To gain an in-depth understanding of the research topic, I performed an extensive review of literature on servant leadership theory, alternative leadership theories in relation to servant leadership, and employee turnover to provide a critical analysis and synthesis of the various journal articles, reports, and seminal scholarly works related to the study.

The literature review begins with a presentation of servant leadership theory, which was used as the conceptual framework in this study, and the constructs used in Van Dierendonck and Nuijten's model of servant leadership. I also describe criticisms of servant leadership theory. Next, I expound on alternative and opposing theories, which include transformational leadership and autocratic leadership. Then, I present employee turnover while identifying the themes job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employee retention. Finally, I conclude with an analysis of turnover in relation to leadership.

The review of academic literature began with a search for specific keywords such as *servant leadership*, *employee turnover*, *fast-food industry*, *transformational leadership*, *autocratic leadership*, *job satisfactions*, *employee retention*, and

*organizational commitment*. Databases such as Walden University Library, Business Source Complete, SAGE Journals, ScienceDirect, and ProQuest were sources of information on past and present research, as were Google Scholar and government websites. I reviewed and analyzed a total of 91 sources in the literature review, which included both peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed articles. Among these, 81 (89%) articles were peer reviewed, and 77 (85%) had dates of publication between the years 2016 and 2021.

### **Servant Leadership**

Servant leadership is a leadership theory established and conceptualized by Robert K. Greenleaf, which asserts that a servant leader's primary concern is to serve the necessity of others (Greenleaf, 1970, 1977). Greenleaf (1977) founded servant leadership theory on the belief that a servant leader develops and influences followers through putting them first and highlighted that an individual who prioritizes being a leader first may exploit their followers for personal desires. Researchers have had a great interest in servant leadership theory and developed several models since its emergence 50 years ago (Northouse, 2018). Spears (2002) developed the first servant leadership model based on 10 characteristics he found to focus on Greenleaf's work: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. Researchers have developed other models and have varying views on the definition of servant leadership (Northouse, 2018), which has led to many differences and similarities in studies. Servant leadership theory remains a relevant topic as new models continue to emerge in leadership research and, more

importantly, leaders can use this approach to influence positive organizational results through service to an organization's members.

Leaders can use a servant leadership approach in any organization and at any level of management to achieve productive results. Servant leadership can equip a leader to fulfill the needs of organizational members and build lasting relationships within the community while exhibiting behaviors to enhance their organization (Sims & Morris, 2018; Sousa & Van Dierendonck, 2017). Servant leaders are intrinsically motivated to serve, which internally drives their need to develop others, develop the organization, and serve the community (Jit et al., 2016). Coetzer et al. (2017) suggested that a servant leader functions operationally in an effort to prioritize the constructs of building relationship and empowerment, or they function strategically to prioritize conceptualization and humility. A servant leader's ability to identify and comprehend the structure or state of an organization allows them to have a more productive impact when exercising a servant leadership approach (Eva et al., 2018). The behaviors of a servant leader can set an organization up for success. Servant leaders influence positive relationships while developing future servant leaders who will be cognizant of organizational circumstances and self-driven to serve others and their organization.

Many organizations have adopted a servant leadership model to attain an increase in organizational performance. Gandolfi et al. (2017) argued for the significance of servant leadership in today's organizations while arguing the realities and misconceptions of servant leadership theory. The authors explained that servant leadership is not a popular style of leadership but is essential in organizations today. Gandoli et al. explained

that servant leadership allows for the further development of organizational members and advances the development of an organization's performance compared to other leadership styles. Lee et al. (2019) aligned with Gandolfi et al. and added that servant leadership is more effective in addressing organizational functions as well as employee behavior. Lee et al. conducted a meta-analysis of 130 studies on servant leadership and concluded that servant leadership positively impacts organizational performance. Organizations could jeopardize the effectiveness of leaders, the advancement of performance, and the development of productive subordinate behavior using leadership approaches other than servant leadership, thus impacting their culture.

Servant leaders have the ability to influence and reinforce a desired culture for an organization. The concept of servant leadership is unique among other leadership theories due to the servant leader's ability to enhance the lives of others while improving their organization's culture (Greenleaf, 1970), which could include reducing high employee turnover rates. Gotsis and Grimani (2016) argued that servant leaders positively affect organizations through constructs such as empowerment and humility, thus creating a productive culture among organizations as well as communities. Essentially, a servant leader exhibiting humility and promoting empowerment, which are just two of the constructs used in Van Dierendonck's model, can transform the behaviors of subordinates. Those influenced subordinates can then emulate the behaviors taught by servant leaders to further develop positive organizational cultures. Stollberger et al. (2019) aligned with Gotsis and Grimani and proclaimed servant leadership necessary at all levels of organizations. Stollberger et al. analyzed 239 surveys consisting of 155

employees and 84 supervisors to test whether there was a relationship between managerial servant leadership and direct supervisor servant leadership. The authors recorded a positive relationship between the variables and concluded that the trickle-down effect of servant leadership from manager to supervisor to employee positively influences various levels of an organization's performance. Servant leaders have the ability to modify the behaviors of organizational members to meet expected performance, but more importantly, a servant leader can positively transform the culture of an organization enduring high turnover through their level of management.

Van Dierendonck's model of servant leadership was used in the conceptual framework of this study to explore strategies that fast-food industry leaders use to reduce high turnover rates. Among the developed servant leadership models, Van Dierendonck accentuated the contrasting culmination of serving while leading (Eva et al., 2019). Eva et al. (2019) further explained that servant leaders develop subordinates through the delegation of responsibility and demonstrate humility through open acceptance of their faults while demonstrating their intentions of greater good. In other research, Van Dierendonck et al. (2017) suggested that the elements of servant leadership focus on the subordinates of an organization while highlighting their needs, as a link to the success of an organization. Van Dierendonck and Nuijten's model of servant leadership included eight elements, which could reduce employee turnover rates because it is used to focus on the effectiveness of the servant leader in relation to their subordinates, rather than whether an individual is a servant leader (Eva et al., 2019). The effectiveness of Van Dierendonck's servant leadership model involves a leader's ability to influence

productive results for organizations through nurturing the growth of subordinates, which leaders can use to address or prevent behaviors that lead to counterproductive results.

### **Empowerment**

A servant leader can use empowerment to influence employees' commitment to an organization, which may result in reduced employee turnover. Allen et al. (2018) identified a direct link between employee empowerment and organizational commitment. The authors used survey data from 875 nonprofit employees and found that the majority of employees who felt a sense of purpose through empowerment at their jobs reported higher commitment levels in their organizations. Gotsis (2016) noted that servant leadership constructs such as empowerment perpetuate an inclusive work climate, potentially resulting in more positive and productive results for an organization. Kim and Fernandez (2016) conveyed that employee empowerment and job satisfaction related to employee turnover within their study, while imparting that empowerment alone does not have a strong impact on turnover. However, Van Dierendonck et al. (2017) emphasized that empowerment is a developmental aspect of providing servant leadership, which Dutta and Khatri (2017) found to be a positive influencer of reducing employee turnover in the current complex business environment. Employees who are empowered can act independently and operate in a culture where their purpose contributes to the organization's goals instead of feeling that they are inadequate members in their organization.

## **Humility**

The display of a leader's humility can influence an employee to stay with an organization. Li et al. (2016) defined humble leadership behavior as a leadership approach that empowers followers and displays the humility of the leader. The authors found that humble leadership behavior influences a more effective organizational culture and inspires employee commitment to an organization. In another study, Zhou and Li (2018) examined the impact of a leader's humility on turnover intention. They evaluated the data provided by 157 employees and found that the perception of a humble leader and organizational commitment had a positive relationship. Employees were more likely to stay in an organization based on a following a humble superior. The authors suggested that leadership style and organizational culture were interrelated. When a leader's action did not align with the culture of the organization, employees were more likely to leave their organization. Employees are more receptive to a leader who portrays humility, which can make a leader more impactful on an employee's commitment to an organization and may lead to reduced turnover rates.

## **Standing Back**

Servant leaders could place subordinates in positions or situations to spotlight their purpose. Standing back permits a leader to emphasize the success of their subordinates and provide suitable praise for their accomplishments (Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) defined standing back as a cognitive complexity that furthers subordinate development through enabling the occurrences of developmental circumstances. Rombaut and Guerry (2020) further

explained in their study that uplifting employees through recognition, which leaders could achieve through standing back, can reduce turnover intentions because the recognition that a subordinate receives results in increased satisfaction with the organization. Huning et al. (2020) generated data from 115 employees across different organizations in the southeastern United States to examine the impact of servant leadership in relation to turnover intentions. The authors recorded those elements such as standing back focused on employee development, which increased their connection to the organization. By standing back, a leader creates opportunities for intrinsic rewards that could fulfill employees' desires beyond tangible rewards such as money and reduce employees' turnover intentions.

### **Authenticity**

Servant leaders can influence a productive culture in an organization through a display of genuineness and transparency, thus reducing turnover. Servant leaders exemplify their morals and beliefs through a deliberate exhibition of their true character (Sims & Morris, 2018). In their research, Chon and Zolton (2019) found that the culture of an organization affected employees' turnover intention in the food service industry. Chon and Zolton identified servant leadership characteristics such as authenticity as positive influencers on an organization's culture resulting in positive employee behavior and performance. Thacker et al. (2019) supported Chon and Zolton's findings that the subordinates of an organization determine the culture of the organization by their view of their leader, while consequently servant leaders who exhibit authenticity generate a stronger commitment to an organization in their members. Participants also reported that

the relationship with a servant leader fostered a culture of community within the organization, thus increasing the longevity of quality employees within the organization. Servant leaders provide effective communication and an ethical model that employees value more compared to a hypocritical leader, who also taints their view of the organization.

### **Forgiveness**

Servant leaders could use forgiveness to influence a culture of productiveness within their organizations. Coetzer et al. (2017) suggested that employees endure lesser amounts of stress when leaders exonerate their previous errors. Kashyap and Rangnekar (2016) used a sample of 253 employees in India to investigate the type of effect that servant leaders had on turnover intention. Kashyap and Rangnekar agreed with Coetzer et al. that elements of servant leadership led to elevated levels of trust. The authors asserted that servant leaders served as momentous influencers on employee perceptions on their organizations through elements such as forgiveness. Servant leaders can use forgiveness to reduce turnover intentions by removing the stigma that mistakes equal failure and allow employees to grow within the organization rather than leave because of an unempathetic leader.

### **Courage**

Leaders who exhibit courage in their organizations could facilitate a culture to influence proactive behaviors of their subordinates. According to Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011), courage involves a servant leader's willingness to question the status quo to produce improved methods and behaviors. Akdol and Arikboga (2017) highlighted that

servant leaders possess the fortitude to precariously defy the norms of their organization in the absence of the support of higher management to drive innovational results. A servant leader has the ability to enthrall their employees through a bold display of service to others and through a defined vision that galvanizes their commitment to an organization (Coetzer et al., 2017). Hence, fast-food industry leaders could use courage to drive vision to create a culture that cultivates the commitment of their employees to their organization.

### **Accountability**

Servant leaders could use accountability as a mechanism to provide purpose to subordinates and influence their attitude towards remaining in their organization. Coetzer et al. (2017) recognized accountability as a functioning characteristic applicable to both leader and subordinate. Coetzer et al. explained that accountability in terms of the leader promoted productive outcomes among subordinates as well as the organization through a display of responsible behavior. Ragnarsson et al. (2018) highlighted that servant leaders apply accountability by holding their subordinates accountable for all parameters within their duties. Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) noted that servant leaders increase the confidence of subordinates through issuing them responsibilities, while strengthening their level of trust and ability reach their desired aspirations. A leader who is accountable gains a positive perspective from employees through responsible decision making and influences a culture of responsibility that fulfills their employees' sense of purpose, which can extend to their commitment to the organization.

## **Stewardship**

Servant leaders could use stewardship to foster a culture of belonging among members in their organization. Gotsis and Grimani (2016) examined the constructs of servant leadership such as stewardship and determined that leaders could create positive organizational results through the facilitation inclusive environments. The authors further exclaimed that stewardship is a critical construct leaders use in assigning responsibility and advancing a work environment that caters to the well-being of others. Coetzer et al (2017) contended that the element stewardship encompasses other servant leadership constructs such as accountability and humility, which enables a leader to forge positive organizational outcomes. Through stewardship, leaders can secure the future vitality of their organization by creating a culture that resonates among employees, encourages employees' decision to stay with their organization, and develops future stewards of their profession.

## **Criticisms Against Servant Leadership Theory**

Although the servant leadership approach has the potential to benefit organizations, some researchers have reservations about the theory and its potential flaws. Some researchers opined the title servant leader incongruous with the concept of leadership (Northouse, 2018; Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015). Researchers also questioned the ambiguity of the servant leadership theory components and end results (Andersen, 2018). Andersen (2018) further explained that Greenleaf coined servant leadership but never formally provided a definition, which resulted in various expositions of the theory and at least 16 different models. Alvesson and Einola (2019) criticized the

servant leadership theory in their study while exploring the flaws of positive leadership theories. The authors argued that the conceptualization of a “people first” leader seemed intriguing yet unrealistic in a business setting where organizational decisions based on all stakeholders could be contradicting to the subordinates of a servant leader. No leadership theory is without flaws to include servant leadership and the adaptation of a leadership approach will vary based on an individual’s perceptions.

Researchers have perceived various downsides to the servant leadership approach. The flaw of lacking coherence in the influential techniques and processes of servant leadership results in further misconception of the theory (Northouse, 2018). Hills (2020) noted that some of the complexities of initiating a servant leadership approach within an organization include the reorganization of the organizations’ priorities, proactiveness in acquiring subordinate input, and the implementation of self-development/self-awareness of leadership. Hills further explained that such complex steps contributed to the common misconception that servant leadership is an illogical theory and individuals do not act as a business leader but as accommodators to only their subordinates. Alvesson and Finola (2019) aligned with Hills when they reported that some managers believe the idea of a servant leader approach too good to be true and that it is paradoxical to consider the needs of subordinates to be more important than the needs of the organization. Since some leaders may misunderstand servant leadership, it could be difficult to communicate how to apply servant leadership to an organization, which could result in the misalignment of an organization due to a leader ineffectively implementing a servant leadership approach.

Servant leadership remains relevant regardless of some researchers' condemnation of the theory. Despite identified flaws and scholarly criticisms of servant leadership, Eva et al. (2019) noted that servant leadership has continued to further evolve as a prevailing leadership theory for over two decades. Gandolfi et al. (2017) explored the significance of servant leadership in today's organizations while defining what servant leadership is and is not. The authors defended the necessity of servant leadership although it is not a common approach to leadership. Savel and Munro (2017) agreed with Gandolfi et al. explaining that servant leadership could seem like a challenging leadership approach to implement; however, individuals can create extraordinary results for an organization using a servant leadership approach. Kiersch and Peters (2017) considered servant leadership as the needed approach for the development of society's' next era of leaders. Although leaders would have to develop in some areas to effectively implement a servant leadership approach, they can create beneficial results for their organization such as strengthening a productive culture, prolonging commitment, and decreasing turnover.

Researchers have frequently used the servant leadership theory when exploring employee turnover despite recognized criticisms. Jang and Kandampully (2017), Chon and Zoltan (2019), and Thacker et al. (2019) used the servant leadership theory in successful studies to explore the phenomena of employee turnover in different organizations. More specifically, Bavik (2020) conducted a systematic review and analysis of the servant leadership approach of management within the hospitality industry. The author reviewed 106 articles between the years 1970 and 2018 pertaining to management studies of the hospitality industry. He suggested that the servant leadership

approach is a distinctive approach for hospitality industry leaders requiring further exploration. Consequently, I selected the servant leadership theory as the viewpoint to explore strategies fast-food industry managers use to reduce high employee turnover rates.

### **Alternative and Opposing Leadership Theories**

While investigating the phenomenon of employee turnover, I reviewed alternate and opposing leadership theories that one could use while exploring employee turnover in the fast-food industry. Transformational leadership theory was identified as a similar leadership theory that one could use to approach the issue of high employee turnover rates. Brown et al (2020) suggested that incorporating servant leadership qualities into a leadership approach such as transformational leadership could enhance the effectiveness of a leaders approach compared to using a singular leadership approach. Autocratic leadership theory was identified as an opposing leadership theory to servant leadership. The use of additional theories can assist researchers when conducting an exhaustive exploration of a research problem (Brown et al., 2016). By investigating a similar and opposite leadership theory, a leader can gain a greater insight on a leadership approach that they consider effective in their organization.

### ***Transformational Leadership Theory***

Transformational leadership is a leadership theory that business researchers often use in their studies that has similarities to servant leadership within its constructs. The transformational leadership theory was theorized by James McGregor Burns in 1978 (Burns, 1978). The foundation of transformational leadership is that the leader facilitates the alignment of the members' values to that of the organization. The four elements of

transformational leadership include idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Alatawi, 2017). Hendrikz and Engelbrecht (2019) conducted an analysis of value-based theories and found that transformational leadership has positive constructs to integrate into a productive leadership model but focused on organizational goals rather than the members of the organization. Burns (1978) explained that transformational leaders influence the achievement of positive goals, which could include reducing employee turnover. Transformational leadership and servant leadership have many commonalities with regards to positive leadership characteristics that result in productive organizational outcomes, which prompts their comparison in business research to include employee turnover.

Researchers often explore the impact of similarities and differences of both transformational and servant leadership approaches in organizations. Some researchers identified transformational and servant leadership as value-based leadership approaches that have overlapping constructs within their conceptual framework (Eva et al., 2019). Kiker et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis of 67 studies comparing the relationship between the constructs of both leadership theories and organizational variables such as employee commitment and performance. The authors concluded that both leadership approaches positively influenced organizational outcomes; however, servant leaders' impact both internal and external stakeholders of an organization to include societal members, while transformational leaders oblige themselves solely to the organization. Similarly, Andersen (2018) compared at least 16 versions of both servant and

transformational leadership theories in his study. Andersen identified that servant leadership is aimed towards the overall well-being of subordinates, while transformational leadership focuses on the goals of the organization. He specifically noted that servant leadership directly affects how employees perceive the leader while, the focus of a transformational leader is the organization's objectives and ensuring employees give their best toward that goal. Therefore, leaders in a multitude of organizations could employ the methods of both a servant and transformational leader to attain the results cited from the above studies including turnover reduction.

A servant leadership approach compared to a transformational leadership approach could reduce turnover rates in the fast-food industry. Hoch et al. (2018) conducted a meta-analysis comparing several leadership theories with transformational leadership and found that both servant leadership and transformational leadership approaches yielded distinct effectiveness in positive organizational outcomes such as reducing employee turnover. Korejan and Shahbazi (2016) found that transformational leaders increase positive factors such as organizational commitment by developing members while creating a desired organizational environment. Allen et al. (2016) indicated that transformational and servant leaders facilitate a culture that empowers members and create productive relationships, thus resulting in their longevity within their organizations. The authors also noted an increased use of the servant leadership model in the top U.S. companies dating back to the year 2011 compared to the use of transformational leadership models. Huang et al. (2016) added that a fast-food organization, which is subcategorized as a hospitality industry organization, yielded

higher organizational performance ratings under a CEO who used the servant leadership approach compared to a transformational leadership approach. Transformational leaders can potentially yield the same results within their organization as servant leaders; however, servant leaders are becoming more relevant in organizations and promote a sense of community while prioritizing their subordinates which helps to gain a greater sense of organizational commitment compared to transformational leaders.

### ***Autocratic Leadership Theory***

The autocratic leadership theory or authoritarian leadership theory is the opposite of the servant leadership theory. Lewin et al. (1939) contributed to the initial research of the autocratic leadership approach in management and found that an autocratic leader uses their power or position for personal gain. Lewin and other researchers identified authoritarian leadership as a standard during their time which, motivated their exploration of more participatory approaches in management and leadership (Burns, 2007). Unlike participative leadership styles such as servant leadership, the elements of the autocratic leadership approach involve a leader who functions with no subordinate input in a highly structured work environment (Harms et al., 2018). Servant leaders and autocratic leaders have different approaches and impact their organizations' culture from opposite spectrums which results in varying degrees of organizational outcomes.

The results in employee turnover rates could differ in an organization led by an autocratic leader compared to a servant leader. Savel and Munro (2017) explained that some leaders may be more comfortable with an authoritarian style of leadership compared to a "bottom-up" approach such as servant leadership or view the servant

leadership approach as a challenge to the status quo. However, Wang et al. (2018) suggested that the behaviors and styles of leadership are important elements in the culture of an organization and could contribute to the turnover rates. Wang et al. collected the survey data of 624 supervisor–subordinate dyads from Mainland China and Taiwan to examine relationship between authoritarian leadership and employee turnover intentions. The authors found that authoritarian leadership had a positive relationship with employee turnover intentions and can be perceived as a dictatorship in the workplace which could result in higher employee turnover rates. Hence, fast-food industry leaders could benefit from using a servant leadership approach rather than an autocratic leadership approach to advance a sustaining and productive culture while reducing high turnover rates.

### **Employee Turnover**

Employee turnover in the fast-food industry is the business problem explored in this study. Employee turnover refers to the separation of an employee from their organization (Olubiyi et al., 2019). Lee et al. (2019) sourced the initial research of employee turnover years back to over a century. The authors found that even with the thousands of contributions of research on the topic of employee turnover, that unknown perspectives of the topic remain to explore. The authors also suggested that the future of research on employee turnover has the potential to provide innovative and promising contributions to the topic. Despite the contributions of researchers and research opportunities, Basnyat and Clarence Lao (2020) declared that most businesses lack an effective strategy to address the problem of employee turnover. Some industries face higher turnover rates than other. Researchers have found that employee turnover in the

hospitality industry often exceeds the rates of many other industries (Datta, 2020; Tews et al., 2019) and the fast-food industry, one of the five sectors of the hospitality industry, requires an adequate strategy to reduce turnover. Many fast-food organizations have a high percentage of failure within the first five years of creation due to an inadequate approach to turnover (Bradley et al., 2017; Mhlanga, 2018). Fast-food organizations encounter a higher propensity of employee turnover compared to organizations of other industries and identifying the successful methods of servant leaders could help fast-food industry leaders intervene to reduce turnover.

The two types of turnover are voluntary and involuntary turnover. Lee (2017) found that different types of turnover have various effects on an organization. Lee (2017) conducted a study to examine various types of employee turnover including employee transfers, quits, and involuntary turnover (such as retirement) in relation to the performance of U.S. Federal organizations. The author found that some involuntary turnover such as the termination of employees who displayed poor performance or contributed negatively to the work environment advantageous to organizations. Lyons and Bandura (2020) identified voluntary turnover as the loss of skillful employees and deemed a major concern when the loss of such employees outweighs attaining appropriate replacements. Unlike involuntary turnover, voluntary turnover requires distinct attention due to the loss of employees outside of the organizations' immediate control (Holtom & Burch, 2016). Turnover is a regular function in business however it still requires an effective strategy for leaders to manage. A well-managed voluntary

turnover rate can allow a leader to sustain effective business operations and mitigate losing employees from factors within their control.

The well-being of an employee and condition of their work environment could influence their turnover intention. Researchers have found that high turnover rates are a culmination of unaddressed factors that positively influence an employee's turnover intention (Sun & Wang, 2017). Wu et al. (2017) evaluated data collected from 424 human resource professionals within 14 Pakistan media networks to examine the relationship between employees' well-being and their turnover intention. The authors associated the well-being of employees with their job satisfaction, organizational commitment, work engagement, and life satisfaction. Wu et al. found that employees with positive outcomes of identified well-being constructs were less likely to leave their organization or have an intention to. Dwesini (2019) recommended that leaders strategize their approach of mitigating turnover by recognizing the source of productivity inhibitors within their organization. Leaders create an environment that increases the welfare of employees while considering what factors influence employee turnover intentions in order to influence greater commitment to their organization.

High employee turnover could negatively affect an organization in multiple areas. Seyrek and Turan, (2017) highlighted that high turnover leads to a drawback in profitability, while placing the organization at a human resource disadvantage which lessens their productivity. Lyons and Bandura (2020) further explained that the unfortunate drawbacks of turnover impact an organization directly and indirectly. The authors articulated that recruitment is a costly, direct result of turnover. They also noted

that loss of a skilled member and interruption of work environment is a costly indirect result of turnover. Organizations with higher employee turnover rates have a work environment that predispose new employees to a culture of early voluntary separation of employment. Organizations decrease profitability due to staffing and inefficiency in their processes, which also sways the turnover intention of current employees who work in a culture of increased workload due to frequent terminations of employment.

### **Job Satisfaction**

An employee's satisfaction with their job could affect their turnover intention. Job satisfaction remains a consistent theme within research of employee turnover, which higher satisfaction resulted in lower turnover (Kim and Fernandez, 2016). Lee et al. (2018) conducted a study examining job scarcity in relation to voluntary turnover. After collecting survey data from over 250,000 employees, the authors found that job scarcity did not have a particular influence on turnover; however, they linked employees' increased satisfaction with their organization to a decreased number of employees who departed their organization. Similarly, Stamolampros et al. (2019) conducted a study to examine the variable of job satisfaction and employee turnover in the tourism and hospitality industries. The authors analyzed data provided from Glassdoor, an anonymous employer review site, of 297,933 employee reviews from 11,975 U.S tourism and hospitality organizations. The authors also identified job satisfaction as a determining factor for turnover intention and explained that many of the employee reviews suggested themes that impacted jobs satisfaction to include organizational culture and leadership. Therefore, leaders can shape the culture of their organization to increase an employee's

satisfaction and mitigate contributing factors of job dissatisfaction or risk higher employee turnover rates.

The culture of an organization could impact the level of job satisfaction among employees. Leaders directly impact the work environment and organizations' culture which can change employees' outlook of the organization including the possibilities of upward momentum, identifying as just a number, and their overall satisfaction (Bartock, 2019). Kurniawaty et al. (2019) identified the work environment as a major element that impacts the culture of an organization. The authors further articulated that creating a work environment conducive to a productive organizational culture increases job satisfaction. Ann and Blum (2020) examined motivational factors of employees in terms of job satisfaction and turnover intention utilizing Herzberg's two-factor theory as the theoretical framework. Using both a satisfaction and dissatisfaction survey, the authors found that participants of the study who received recognition and generally enjoyed their type of work were satisfied. The authors concluded that job satisfaction had a negative effect on turnover intention meaning the more satisfied the employees were, the less likely they were to have intentions on leaving their organization. Leaders can influence a satisfying culture through an approach that uplifts employees which is similar to some characteristics of a servant leader who also influences a positive organization culture.

Leader activities and approaches could also impact the culture and level of job satisfaction among employees. Chang and Busser (2020) conducted a study surveying 300 hospitality employees to examine career satisfaction in relation to their turnover intentions. The results of the study showed that employees who felt fulfillment within

their career and received organizational support were more inclined to commit to their organization for longer periods. The authors explored the employees' perception of managements' organizational support in relations to job satisfaction and employee turnover intention. The authors found that organizational support from management led to increased retention in hospitality organizations and reduced the psychological complexities of employees going from job to job within the industry. Leaders should align their activities within their organizations with elements that advance the organizational commitment of employees because they are less likely to voluntarily terminate employment at a job where they find contentment.

### **Organizational Commitment**

Job satisfaction is often linked to an increased organizational commitment of employees which could influence turnover rates of an organization. Yam et al. (2018) explored the many factors that contribute to long periods of organizational commitment in employees of the hospitality industry, which consistently endures high levels of employee turnover. The authors looked to identify themes that motivated employees to remain in their organization. The authors found that employees' job satisfaction as well as an attachment to their community to be great influencers for employees to maintain their employment. Ohunakin et al. (2018) argued that managers should be cognizant of elements such as employee goals and career progression in order to retain their employees. The authors found that employees' career growth and opportunities within their organization linked to higher levels of organization commitment in employees. Employees will not commit to an organization for a long period where they are not

happy. Leaders can directly influence the organizational commitment of their employees through understanding what fulfills their employees, which can also help leaders curtail their turnover rates.

The organizational commitment of employees can vary based on the industry they work in. Organizational commitment remains a significant determinant in fast-food employee turnover intention (Adnan et al., 2018). Ulabor and Bosede (2019) examined the effect of employee commitment on their performance in fast-food organizations. The authors conducted a quantitative study and surveyed 96 employees. The results of the study showed that employee commitment positively impacted job performance. Ulabor and Bosede suggested that fast-food industry employees are more prone to an increased work performance if they feel a greater sense of commitment to their organization. The authors found that higher levels of employee commitment resulted in a reduced amount of employee separations within fast-food organizations. However, in fast-food organizations where there are higher turnover rates, employees can face interruptions in performance due to inadequate staff and their commitment to an organization could lessen.

A lack of emotional support could impact an employees' commitment to an organization and result in higher turnover rates. Tews et al. (2019) conducted a study to explore how the climate of the work environment between coworkers relate to their turnover intention in the hospitality industry. The authors acknowledged that turnover in the hospitality industry has continued to be a great challenge. The authors concluded that employees with or perceived abusive coworkers at the entry level left their job at a higher

rate than those who experienced emotional support from managers and coworkers. In another study Cho et al. (2017) examined the commitment and turnover intention determinants of 126 frontline retail employees. The authors used the emotion regulation theory for their theoretical framework and found the three emotional constructs that impacted turnover intentions when the scores were higher. Higher scores indicated job dissatisfaction. Overall, the authors concluded that managers should understand that employee emotions are critical in increasing their organizational commitment and reducing high employee turnover rates. Consequentially, employees who feel as if their organizational leaders care for them may feel a greater sense of belonging to their organization resulting in the longevity of their employment compared to a leader who lacks in emotional support.

### **Employee Retention**

An organizational leader's ability to retain employees is referred to as employee retention and is a major function of organizational leaders. Employee retention involves the activities of organizational leaders that result in retaining talented members for longer periods while mitigating challenges that may prompt them to voluntarily separate (Kundu & Lata, 2017; Ohunakin et al., 2018). Leaders form the culture of their organization which can vary based on their style and foster an atmosphere of dedicated employees. Carter et al. (2019) suggested that a leader's approach shapes the culture in an organization, which could determine their intention to remain in an organization. Yam et al. (2018) added that employee instability can lead to issues with retention in organizations and result in unmanageable turnover rates. Tenakwah (2021) exclaimed

that the complexity of retaining employees has created an increase in turnover rates and strained the advancement of organizations globally. Leaders who strengthen employee retention produce lower turnover rates in organizations (Nelesh et al., 2018). Leaders must establish and sustain a strategy for retention to avoid preventable employee turnover, which they have the potential to implement through an effective leadership approach.

Organizations could use competitive pay to retain employees. Choi and Fernández-Blanco (2017) examined survey data dating back to 1996 on new employees in organizations and their likelihood to leave their organization within a year. The authors found that within the first year 40% of new employees left their organization within a year and that by the second year the rate was 24%. The authors concluded that second year employees yielded a lower separation percentage due to receiving an increase in wages. Employees of various industries often attribute their turnover intentions to low or noncompetitive pay, and this results in high turnover rates in organizations (Huang & Zhang, 2017; Madariaga et al., 2018). Leaders could use pay as a strategy to retain employees because employees are less likely to seek higher wages elsewhere when organizations continuously offer competitive pay and raises.

Leaders could rely on effective retention strategies to offset high turnover rates in their organization. Wright (2021) conducted a systematic review exploring employee turnover in relation to organizational culture and employee retention. The author reviewed 51 articles consisting of empirical evidence applicable to employee turnover. The author articulated that adequate strategies for retaining employees include the

approach leaders use to direct the culture of their organization, the fulfillment of employees, and possibilities for growth. Yet, leaders who fail to productively influence their organizations' culture struggle with retaining quality employees (Chang & Busser, 2020). Lyons and Bandura (2020) recommended that leaders enlighten themselves on the current climate of their work environment, establish purposeful communication plans, ensure sufficient compensation for work, and adhere to the developmental needs of employees to sway their decisions to remain in an organization. Overall, leaders are responsible for the reinforcement of effective strategies that supplement ongoing retention operations within their organizations (Al Mamun & Hasan, 2017). As the creators and influencers of policies and programs, leaders should recognize deficiencies in their organization's retention program; leaders should also take consistent actions such as employee recognition, transparent communication, and create pathways for growth that further a culture of retaining employees rather than losing employees.

### **Turnover and Leadership**

The leadership approach one uses could serve as momentous factor in an organizations' turnover rates. Carter et al. (2019) examined the relationship between strong leadership skills/abilities and employee retention within U.S. Army organizations. The authors did not specify a leadership style of a strong leader rather they identified the factors: (a) affective praise, (b) resourcefulness, (c) influencing productive climate, (d) exemplifying stewardship, and (e) guiding the organizations culture as strong leadership abilities. The authors asserted that the impact of strong leaders influenced employees' view of their organization resulting in lower turnover intentions. Li et al. (2016)

conducted a study to examine the effects of leadership behavior on employee turnover intention. The authors highlighted a leader's behavior and competence as critical factors in subordinates' perspective on staying in an organization. Leaders influence the culture of an organization beyond policy and their actions linger in the minds of employees. Employees relate the climate of an organization to those who lead it, and the style of leadership can result in retaining or losing employees.

Leaders could increase organizational commitment in an organization through a positive leadership approach. The functions of a positive/productive leadership style could contribute to factors that entice an individual to stay with an organization rather than voluntarily separate (Li et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2018). Zhou and Li (2018) supported that an individual viewed as a principled leader maintains the commitment of employees and has fewer employee separations. Lapointe and Vandenberghe (2018) noted that servant leaders influence commitment and positive behaviors in organizations while reducing antisocial behaviors. Eliot (2020) connected the development provided by a servant leader to increased levels of resiliency in organizational members. Eliot suggested that complexities of change and challenges in organizations require resilient organizational members who respond productively. He found that the attributes of a servant leader contributed to the emotional well-being of organization members and their increased resiliency resulted in improved welfare of individuals in organizations, which lower turnover intentions. Leaders who adopt a leadership approach with servant leadership characteristics could reduce turnover because they are more inclined to

contribute to the betterment of an employee and serve as a resource for employees while proactively addressing workplace adversities.

Recently, researchers have explored developing value-based leadership theories such as authentic leadership in relation to employee turnover. Hendrikz and Engelbrecht (2019) conducted a study to examine the integration of value-based leadership theories as a method to overcome unethical organizational behavior of management. They identified servant, transformational, authentic, and principle-based leadership as theories with potential constructs to integrate. The authors used survey data from 13 professionals in the field of leadership. They argued that organizations that lack constructs of value-based leadership theories in their leadership approach resulted in organizations with counterproductive cultures which could influence high employee turnover rates. However, when compared to servant or transformational leadership, authentic leadership has received criticism regarding distinction and effectiveness (Hoch et al., 2018). While authentic leadership lacks in empirical data and proven effectiveness in research, its development and evaluation of effectiveness shows that value-based leadership theories matter in addressing business problems such as turnover.

Value-based leadership approaches such as servant leadership and authentic leadership could yield varying results in relation to themes of employee turnover. Arici (2018) conducted a study to examine authentic leadership in relation to employee perceptions of management and their turnover intention in the hospitality industry. The authors collected survey data from 305 hospitality industry employees. The author found that employees who perceived the support of their supervisors in alignment with an

authentic leadership style had few turnover intentions compared to employees who perceived management unsupportive. Ling et al. (2016) examined the effectiveness of servant leadership compared to authentic leadership in hospitality organizations. The factors compared included employee work performance, organizational commitment, and employee engagement. The study included 1,132 employee/supervisor pairs. The authors found that a servant leadership approach had a more substantiating impact on positive employee behavior compared to authentic leadership. Servant leadership played a key contributing role in a positive organizational culture, which leads to positive outcomes in performance, engagement, and retention. Similarly, Kaya and Karatepe (2020) conducted a study to examine the impact of servant leadership and authentic leadership on employee engagement, satisfaction, and performance. The authors surveyed 350 hotel employees to assess their supervisor support, work engagement, and adaptive performance. The results showed that servant leadership had a greater positive impact on career satisfaction compared to authentic leadership. The impact of servant leadership showed a more direct effect compared to authentic leadership, however the indirect impact of authentic leadership proved useful to employees in specific circumstances outside of a work relationship. Authentic leadership unlike servant leadership is still undergoing development by researchers, however some of the constructs mirror a servant leaders' application of approach since servant leadership has been deemed effective in many studies about employee turnover. Organizational leaders may create more productive outcomes by using servant leadership to address high employee turnover which remains an ongoing issue in many organizations.

The use of a servant leadership style could reduce turnover rates in an organization. Jang and Kandampully (2017) analyzed the turnover intention of frontline employees in the restaurant industry and their perception of management as servant leaders. The authors surveyed 213 employees and found that the servant leadership approach facilitated behaviors that positively affected elements such as ethical behaviors and motivated organizational commitment. The authors argued that restaurants with immoderate levels of turnover intentions proactively establish leadership development and training using servant leadership constructs to motivate organizational commitment. Bavik (2020) expanded on Jang and Kandampully, adding that the aspects of the hospitality industry and constructs of servant leadership have corresponding elements. Heyler and Martin (2018) also argued that a servant leadership approach in conjunction with another management approach could increase organizational performance, increase satisfaction of employees, and lead to reduced turnover. Servant leaders build relationships with members and focus on their improvement; this can lead to reforming an employee's ideals of an organization and decrease their intention of voluntary separation.

Leaders could use a servant leadership approach as an effective style in hospitality establishments such as fast-food industry organizations. Bavik (2020) identified the hospitality industry as one with a "serving" culture which can influence management to undertake a servant leadership approach towards peers and subordinates, while contributing to favorable results in employee satisfaction and commitment. Fast-food industry employees could find themselves in difficult situations based on customer

interactions. Many customer service employees including those in fast-food organizations also encounter increased amounts of incivility during customer interacts which negatively impacts their long-term commitment to their organization (Kashif et al., 2017). Bani-Melhem et al. (2020) examined customer incivility, turnover intentions, and employee empowerment in relation to their revenge intentions in their organization. The authors collected data from 184 frontline employees in the hospitality industry to examine their response to rude customer behavior and how management empowerment influenced their turnover intention. The authors found that increased levels of empowerment from managers contributed to employees decision to remain in their organization despite dealing with high levels of customer incivility. Chon and Zolton (2019) agreed with Bani-Melhem that servant leadership and elements such as empowerment could benefit organizations and assist with addressing organizational challenges such as incivility. Chon and Zolton further explained that hospitality organizations that embrace a servant leadership approach could yield increased retention rates, employee performance, and sustainability overall. Servant leaders build healthy relationships within their organizations that can influence employees to exhibit positive behavior despite negative customer interactions that occur in fast-food organizations. The support employees gain from servant leaders outweighs the challenges associated with their industry making it less likely from them to seek employment elsewhere.

### **Transition**

In Section 1, strategies used by fast-food industry managers to reduce employee turnover rates were introduced. Throughout the literature review, servant leadership

theory, transformational leadership, and alternative leadership theories in relation to employee turnover provide a critical analysis and synthesis of the various journals, reports, and seminal scholarly works related to employee turnover. Section 1 includes the background of the problem, purpose, research question, nature of the study, conceptual framework, significance of the study, and literature review. In Section 2, the purpose statement, the role of the researcher, participants, research method and design, population and sampling, data collection instruments and techniques, organizational techniques, data analysis, and reliability and validity are presented. The findings of the study and recommendations are included in Section 3.

## Section 2: The Project

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore leadership strategies used by fast-food industry managers to reduce employee turnover rates. The targeted population consisted of five fast-food industry managers of five different organizations, located in the Midwest United States, who effectively applied leadership strategies to reduce high employee turnover rates. The results of this study may contribute to social change by improving the economic stability of organizations in the fast-food industry that reduce food service unemployment rates and advancing organizational growth, enabling organizations to improve the socioeconomic conditions of local communities.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In this qualitative case study, I was the primary data collection instrument. Yin (2017) expressed great emphasis on the indispensable role of the researcher in qualitative case studies. The researcher functions as the direct instrument in the collection and interpretation of participant experiences and the analysis of data while mitigating bias in qualitative research (Clark & Vealé, 2018). As the researcher, I conducted semistructured interviews while adhering to an interview protocol (Appendix A) with study participants to attain a comprehensive understanding of high employee turnover in the fast-food industry.

As the researcher, I followed the ethical guidelines of the Belmont Report established by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of

Biomedical and Behavioral Research for human participants (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). The major ethical guidelines of the Belmont Report include but are not limited to respect of persons, beneficence, and justice. Shore (2006) highlighted the importance of university researchers receiving their institutions' Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for studies including human participants, which adheres to the Belmont Report. Upon receiving approval from the Walden University IRB, I collected data for this study. Additionally, I adhered to an informed consent process, ensured the confidentiality of participants and data, and provided fair treatment to participants as stipulated in the Belmont Report (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979).

I have no professional experience in the fast-food industry or relationships with participants of the study. I was interested in research on the phenomenon of high employee turnover in the fast-food industry based on the frequency of employee recruitment that I had witnessed at fast-food establishments. I was inclined towards learning more about the complications of employee turnover in the fast-food industry and the strategies that leaders undertake to achieve success in their organization. Researchers conducting a qualitative study can potentially inhibit the reliability of their study knowingly or unknowingly because of personal bias (Fusch et al., 2018). Yin (2015) suggested that qualitative researchers should employ self-awareness in identifying their own bias in addition to using multiple sources of data and fulfilling data triangulation to mitigate bias. To mitigate bias in this study, I used multiple sources of data such as interview data, employee records, and organizational documents that support the accounts of participants' strategies to reduce turnover rates in the fast-food industry. I also

employed member checking, which allows participants to verify the accuracy of data provided during interviews to ensure validity of a qualitative study while limiting bias.

Yeong et al. (2018) highlighted the importance of using an interview protocol and its resourcefulness to qualitative researchers in gathering quality data during interviews. Researchers use an interview protocol as a guide during interviews as a formal enhancement to gather meaningful responses from participants rather than meaningless conversation (Yin, 2015). I used an interview protocol (Appendix A) to establish the timeframe of the semistructured interview while adhering to open-ended questions that aligned to the research question. Castillo-Montoya (2016) suggested that researchers use interview protocols to reinforce the reliability of qualitative studies while establishing regularity for each interview. I used an interview protocol to preserve uniformity and improve the accuracy of data collected from participants on the strategies that fast-food industry managers used to reduce high employee turnover rates.

### **Participants**

Participants in this study consisted of five fast-food industry managers of fast-food restaurants located in the Midwest region of the United States with at least 2 years of managerial experience, who effectively applied leadership strategies to reduce high employee turnover rates. Researchers use purposeful sampling to select key participants related to their study to obtain meaningful data (Suri, 2011). Researchers deliberately set criteria for participants' eligibility based on who will most likely provide data that align with the research questions and contribute relevant knowledge to the study of a research phenomenon (Sargeant, 2012). The participants identified had experience and

effectiveness in the necessary leadership strategies to reduce high turnover rates in fast-food industry organizations.

Once I received approval from Walden University's IRB, I gained access to participants through the internet to identify fast-food organizations within the geographic area of the study. Beyond identifying the eligibility of participants, gaining access to participants is imperative in conducting and completing qualitative studies (Dahlke & Stahlke, 2020). Bender et al. (2017) noted that recruitment of study participants online has increased due to the conservation of costs and time for the researcher. Upon contacting the organizations, I asked for the permission of senior leaders to access eligible managers for the study. Once I received approval from organizational leaders to proceed, I emailed participants a copy of the informed consent form and interview protocol, including the research questions.

The researcher/participant relationship is important for the interview process and quality of data attained during interviews. Yin (2015) identified authenticity, transparency, and respect as key factors in establishing a productive relationship with study participants. However, Yin (2015) stressed the need to avoid unethical behaviors and to avoid acts outside the scope of a working relationship. Once I received the contact information and verified the eligibility of participants, I made direct contact through phone and email. Then I provided the participants with purposeful information regarding the study and addressed concerns they may have had while ensuring them of their confidentiality. Finally, I established a set date and time for an interview through Zoom based on the comfort and availability of each participant.

## **Research Method and Design**

### **Research Method**

The three fundamental methods of research are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method (Saunders et al., 2015). I used a qualitative method in this study to explore the strategies that fast-food industry managers use to reduce high employee turnover rates. Researchers in qualitative studies concentrate on participants' in-depth accounts of perspectives and experiences during interviews while utilizing open-ended interview questions to gather data (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). Yin (2015) highlighted that researchers distinctively use a qualitative method to examine social behaviors in which participants' perspectives are the focal point of a study in addition to multiple sources of data. Accordingly, I selected a qualitative method because my intent for this study was to gain in-depth understanding of the experiences and strategies that fast-food-industry managers used for reducing high employee turnover rates.

Researchers use qualitative and quantitative studies to collect different data. Contrary to a qualitative method, researchers use a quantitative method to examine relationships between variables measured numerically (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). A quantitative method was not appropriate for this study because I did not examine the relationship between variables using statistical data. Researchers adopt a mixed methodology to conduct a study using the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods simultaneously (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). The incorporation of a quantitative element did not apply to this study; therefore, a mixed method was not suitable for this study.

## **Research Design**

A researcher has various options when selecting a qualitative research design for their study. Researchers commonly use case study, ethnographic, and phenomenological research designs in qualitative studies based on the required analysis to answer their research question during the exploration of a phenomenon (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). The use of case study research design has increased among business researchers who conduct qualitative studies (Rashid et al., 2019). Additionally, researchers gain a progressive understanding through an extensive exploration of participant perspectives of a real-life phenomenon (Harrison et al., 2017). Researchers can use a single case study approach, which involves an individual, or a multiple case study approach involving several individuals to when conducting a study. Ridder (2017) asserted that using multiple case studies allows researchers to expand the range of discovery and comprehension of their study compared to single case studies. In addition, researchers reach an increased level of reliability and richness through similarity of data from multiple inquiries. I used a multiple case study research design because I collected exhaustive data from multiple fast-food industry managers to further the understanding of strategies for reducing high turnover rates.

Researchers select a research design that will shape how a phenomenon is explored. Researchers consider ethnography, phenomenology, and narrative design when conducting qualitative research (Saunders et al., 2015). The ethnographic researcher explores a phenomenon from a cultural standpoint with a focus on interpreting the actions of an identified social group (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). I did not intend to explore

individuals or groups in their cultural setting; therefore, ethnography was not appropriate for this study. Researchers use a phenomenological design when they seek to explore the life experience of an individual, their worldview, and their interpretations of phenomena (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Phenomenology was not appropriate for this study because I did not explore the worldly views or intend to account for their lived experiences. Lastly, researchers use narrative design when they seek to concentrate on the storytelling of an individual's experience in a qualitative study (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). I did not use a narrative design because I did not interpret the life experience stories of the study participants.

Qualitative researchers achieve data saturation within their study through the adequate collection of data; saturation occurs when the researcher no longer discovers new applicable information (Sargeant, 2012). I attained data saturation through collecting data from interviews and organizational documents until no new information emerged. Suri (2011) explained that researchers ensure data saturation by diligently collecting data and refining the synthesis of multiple sources. Suri highlighted the sufficiency of data as a critical element of data saturation to deliberately synthesize findings. I used methodological triangulation to synthesize multiple data sources during data collection and reached data saturation once there were indications of redundancy during data collection.

### **Population and Sampling**

The population for this study consisted of fast-food industry managers. The sample for this study consisted of five fast-food industry managers from five different

organizations, located in the Midwest United States, who effectively applied leadership strategies to reduce high employee turnover rates. I used a purposive sampling method to select the participants most related to the study. Researchers use purposive sampling to collect comprehensive data that align with their study and can intentionally select samples with different views that challenge the researchers' bias to demonstrate validity (Vasileiou et al., 2018; Yin, 2015). The criteria for eligibility encompassed those fast-food industry managers with at least 2 years of managerial experience who effectively applied leadership strategies to reduce high employee turnover rates. Vasileiou et al. (2018) contended that there is not a particular standard for sample size within qualitative research; rather, the researcher justifies adequacy in attaining data saturation. I ensured data saturation through the collection of comprehensive data during interviews with participants and review of their organizational documents until no new information arose.

### **Ethical Research**

Researchers have the responsibility of identifying and adhering to ethical behavior where ethical challenges are evident when conducting qualitative studies involving human participants (Houghton et al., 2010). Prior to collecting data involving human participants, a researcher must acquire approval from their IRB, whose members collectively review ethical considerations (Yin, 2015). The IRB approval number for this study is 08-22-22-1010416. Once I received approval from the Walden University IRB, I contacted fast-food organizations, requesting permission to contact potential participants. Upon contacting participants, I explained and provided them with an informed consent form. Researchers use informed consent as a process for ensuring the ethical rights of

participants while advising them of any risks or benefits associated with participation in a study (Biros, 2018). I also informed participants that they were able to withdraw from the study or interview at any time. There was no compensation for participation in this study.

In addition to following the informed consent process, researchers can assure the ethical protections of participants by adhering to ethical principles stipulated in the Belmont Report (Biros, 2018). I conducted this study with high-level ethical compliance, by collecting, storing, and handling data in accordance with Walden University IRB and Belmont Report guidelines. Furthermore, I protected the confidentiality of participants by designating identifiers FFM1 through FFM5 to safeguard the participants' identities. I will also ensure the confidentiality of participants and information attained by securing data linked to the study in an unrevealed location within my home for 5 years and later destroying the data.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

I functioned as the primary data collection instrument in this study. In a qualitative study, the researcher acts as the data collection instrument whose functions include collecting data through conducting interviews, observing, interpreting, and analyzing current data (Hollin et al., 2020). Barrett and Twycross (2018) posited that the three primary approaches to data collection include interviews, focus groups, and observations, which allow researchers to gather comprehensive data. Once I received Walden University IRB approval, I conducted and recorded semistructured interviews via Zoom using open-ended interview questions in the interview protocol (Appendix A).

Researchers commonly use semistructured interviews when conducting qualitative studies to focus on a specific topic of exploration, while providing participants the freedom to elaborate their perspective (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). Additionally, researchers use follow-up questions during semistructured interviews that further inquiry regarding data that have yet to emerge (Rabionet, 2011). I planned to conduct a minimum of five semistructured interviews that consisted of seven interview questions (Appendix B) that emphasized the participant's experience and perspectives on leadership strategies to reduce high employee turnover rates. In addition, I followed the process established in the interview protocol with each participant to enable the study's reliability and validity.

Qualitative researchers are responsible for confirming the reliability and validity of their study because they function as primary data collection instruments. Noble and Smith (2015) emphasized that a qualitative researcher's approach to establishing reliability and validity includes mitigating bias, facilitating consistency and validation of transcripts during interviews, and employing methods of data triangulation. I used member checking to mitigate bias to allow participants to ensure the accuracy of the data collected, thus enhancing the credibility of results. Additionally, I used organizational documents as secondary data sources in this multiple case study during data collection to fulfill triangulation.

### **Data Collection Technique**

I used semistructured interviews as the primary data collection technique. Researchers use semistructured interviews to generate robust data through deep exploration of participants' point of view regarding a predetermined topic (Peters &

Halcomb, 2015). After receiving IRB approval, I contacted the managers of the identified organizations and sent the study invitations (Appendix C). When the participants agreed to be part of this study, I provided them an informed consent form for their signature. Once I receive consent, I scheduled a time and date to conduct semistructured interviews via Zoom. Researchers can use video telecommunication applications in qualitative research to provide flexibility in the access participants (Janghorban et al., 2014). I reminded participants that they had the option to withdraw from participating at any time. No compensation was provided for participating in this study. I also collected secondary data through analysis of documents provided by the organization.

There are advantages and disadvantages to all data collections techniques. Researchers can use semistructured interviews to collect data pertaining exclusively to the problem identified in their study (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). Conversely, Barrett and Twycross (2018) highlighted that the interviewee could misinterpret the verbal and non-verbal communication of the researcher, thus impacting their responses. Difficulties can arise during semistructured interviews if participants lack in engagement or reserve important information. (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Another advantage of using a semistructured interview is that researchers can attain a breadth of new data from participant experiences through predetermined questions while allowing flexibility through follow on questions that participants can answer freely (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Rashid et al. (2019) added that researchers could pair semistructured interviews with secondary sources of data such as organizational documents, which enables triangulation. I handled disadvantages by asking clarifying questions if there

were misunderstandings and encouraged participant engagement during the interview process.

Upon completing the interviews, I conducted member checking with each participant to ensure the accuracy of their responses. Researchers use member checking to enhance the reliability of data collected through interviewee verification (Candela, 2019). To enhance validity, participants receive summarized data from their interview to verify the accuracy of the feedback interpreted and captured by the researcher (Birt et al., 2016). I provided each participant with a summarized version of their interview to confirm that the data I collected was correct.

### **Data Organization Technique**

Researchers use interviews, observations, and documentation to generate a significant volume of data relevant to the study (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). I managed and organized data collected through Microsoft Excel, NVivo, and electronic folders on my personal laptop. I scanned and uploaded notes from the interviews into electronic folders. I labeled the electronic files in accordance with each participant's identifier to ensure confidentiality and I employed coding to identify patterns or themes. Researchers use a coding label system for faster access to data while simplifying the process of further data review (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). I stored all data for this study on a flash drive in an undisclosed location in my home where only I can access it. After five years, I will permanently delete and destroy all data in compliance with Walden University IRB and the Belmont Report guidelines.

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is a major process in establishing integrity in qualitative research. It is critical that qualitative researchers are meticulous during data analysis of various sources when conducting a case study (Houghton et al., 2015). Seers (2012) asserted that qualitative researchers analyze numerous forms of data to include interviews, observations, and organizational documents. Researchers use one of the four-triangulation methods in qualitative research to substantiate validity by using multiple sources of rich data (Carter et al., 2014). Carter et al. (2014) further explained that researchers use methodological triangulation to collect and analyze the data of multiple sources and methods during the exploration of a phenomenon. I used methodological triangulation by using semistructured interviews and organizational documents as multiple data collection methods for data analysis.

Researchers plan how they will analyze data collected in qualitative research. Qualitative researchers use a logical approach for data analysis based on the research design, conceptual framework, and form of triangulation used in their study (Mayer, 2015). Yin (2014) identified the five stages to data analysis in qualitative research as collecting, deconstructing, rejoining, understanding, and deducing. I acquired data through conducting semistructured interviews with each participant. Similarly, I collected secondary data from organizational documents including employee/manager handbooks, company policies, company electronic articles and each organizations' mission and vision statement. I deconstructed the data by identifying codes and reconstructed through grouping similar codes and themes. Upon properly interpreting data through simplifying

the information, I employed methodological triangulation to increase validity by synthesizing the themes associated with the identified data sources, reaching data saturation through rigorous analysis to ensure no new data emerges, and contributing to future research through the conclusion of my findings.

During data analysis, researchers identify a specific method for analyzing qualitative data. Qualitative researchers undergo an engrossed data analysis process to enhance the reliability and validity of their study (Maher et al., 2018). Qualitative researchers commonly use a thematic or content analysis approach when interpreting data (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). I used Yin's five steps to perform a thematic analysis while analyzing the interview transcriptions, organizational documents, and review of literature. Unlike content analysis, researchers use thematic analysis for an in-depth understanding to develop codes and themes rather than simply determining a pattern (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). By conducting a thematic analysis, I correlated meaningful themes to substantiate my conclusion and ensure the clarity of my data analysis process.

Upon the completion of data collection, interviews, and document review, I used NVivo while conducting thematic analysis to verify my organization of the data, categorization of the codes, identification of the themes, and conclusions and findings. NVivo is a resourceful analytical tool for qualitative researchers during data management and analysis phases for creating codes and themes (Maher et al., 2018). In order to ensure data saturation, I used semistructured interviews and organizational documents to link distinctive themes within the review of literature. The conceptual framework, servant

leadership theory, was used to help understand how leadership strategies affect employee turnover rates in organizations.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Qualitative researchers produce well founded studies through establishing reliability and validity during all stages of research. Reliability and validity are important facets of qualitative research established and or assessed by researchers to ensure the dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability of a study (Cypress, 2017). Researchers use reliability and validity to assess the caliber of research while exhibiting both rigor and trustworthiness (Rose & Johnson, 2020) Rose and Johnson (2020) further explained that researchers establish reliability through displaying a justified approach to research method and design elements and establish validity through a display of thoroughness during the research process. I fulfilled the criteria of reliability and validity by using the appropriate research methods and ensuring consistency through the data collection and analysis processes.

#### **Reliability**

A qualitative researcher's establishment of trustworthiness ensures the reliability of their study. The reliability of a qualitative research study involves the use of consistent research methods for justifiable means of data collection and analysis (Collingridge & Gantt, 2019). I used an interview protocol to maintain consistency during the data collection process. Researchers enhance dependability and uniformity by using an interview protocol in qualitative research (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). I conducted member checking and methodological triangulation to reinforce the accuracy of data analysis to

enhance dependability while ensuring data saturation. Researchers alleviate the potential for bias through member checking while increasing the trustworthiness of a study (Birt et al., 2016). A researcher reaches the objective of data saturation through triangulation methods which increases the dependability their findings (Fusch et al., 2018). I ensured this study encompassed articulated methods to enhance dependability and produce consistent results.

### **Validity**

Validity in qualitative research is the measure of accuracy in a study and as the researcher, I strived to achieve validity. Researchers view validity as the demonstration of rigor, reliability, and quality within a qualitative study (Hayashi et al., 2019). A researcher substantiates the validity of a qualitative study through using suitable instruments, methods, and data (Leung, 2015). Cypress (2017) emphasized the essentialness of credibility, transferability, and confirmability that a qualitative researcher should assert to exhibit the quality of thoroughness and accuracy of a study. I established and enhanced the validity of this study by using member checking and methodological triangulation, which assisted in reaching data saturation.

### ***Credibility***

The credibility of a study depends on the actions and effort of the researcher. A researcher establishes credibility within a qualitative study through honest and accurate accounts of participants' experiences (Cypress, 2017). I ensured credibility through member checking, which permitted participants to substantiate the interpretation of data collected. Researchers also demonstrate trustworthiness through transparent data

collection and analysis processes which assists with forming credible results (Leung, 2015). I also used methodological triangulation to enhance credibility by synthesizing the results from multiple data sources and showing a reinforced understanding of comprehensive data. Fusch et al. (2018) asserted that using triangulation in qualitative studies allow researchers to establish a vigorous quality of data. Through accurate data collection methods and thorough data analysis, I ensured the credibility of this study.

### ***Transferability***

Transferability is facilitated by the researcher of a study who provides evidence applicable beyond their study. The researcher of a qualitative study does not have the ability to confirm transferability of results, and the reader is responsible for deciding the transferability of applicable context (Tong & Dew, 2016). Qualitative researchers improve the transferability of their study through presenting a comprehensible and detailed account of evidence applicable to elements related to a study except the results (Hayashi et al., 2019). I provided rich descriptions of the sampling, participants, the method and design of this study, while following procedures outlined in the interview protocol to assist with the identification of transferability of my results. While I could not confirm the transferability of the results of this study, I did provide comprehensive details surrounding data collection that could apply to the research of individuals who will explore strategies to reduce turnover in the fast-food industry.

### ***Confirmability***

The confirmability of a study is the final measure of validity that a researcher must establish. The confirmability of qualitative research is established when subjectivity

is removed and trustworthiness is ensured through addressing a study's findings objectively (Hayashi et al., 2019). I used member checking and methodological triangulation to enhance confirmability and mitigate bias. Researchers use member checking as a validity technique to strengthen confirmability and reduce the possibility of bias (Birt et al., 2016). Triangulation methods aid researchers in reaching data saturation through the use of multiple data sources to help reinforce the objectivity of a study (Fusch et al., 2018). I adhered to a solid interview protocol, used member checking, and elicited an in-depth account of participant experiences to further assure confirmability.

### **Transition and Summary**

In Section 2, I reiterated the purpose of this study which was to explore strategies some business fast-food industry leaders use to reduce high employee turnover rates. I explained my role as the researcher as well as the participants. In addition, I provided justification for using a qualitative multiple case study, while elaborating on ethical responsibilities, data collection and data analysis, and how I ensured reliability and validity. In Section 3 I provide an introduction, present the findings while applying them to professional practices, provide recommendations to future studies, reflections of the doctoral journey, and conclusion.

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

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore leadership strategies used by fast-food industry managers to reduce employee turnover rates. The participants of this study consisted of five fast-food industry managers in the Midwest United States who effectively used leadership strategies to reduce high turnover in their organizations. The data collected consisted of interviews with fast-food managers in the Midwest United States and organizational documents that supported the accounts of participants' strategies to reduce turnover rates in their organizations. The findings of this study revealed leadership strategies that fast-food industry managers used in retaining their employees and successfully reducing high employee turnover.

#### **Presentation of the Findings**

The overarching research question of this study was the following: What leadership strategies do fast-food industry managers use to reduce employee turnover rates? The participants of the study were identified as FFM1 through FFM5. I utilized NVivo12 software as an analysis tool while using Yin's five steps to conduct a thematic analysis of the collected data and identified three major themes. The strategies identified aligned with three centralized themes: (a) value-based leadership approach, (b) facilitate effective communication, and (c) enable productive culture and family-like work environment. The findings and three identified themes also showed a connection with existing literature on employee turnover and servant leadership as an effective leadership approach to reduce employee turnover.

### **Theme 1: Value-Based Leadership Approach**

The first theme to emerge through an analysis of participant responses was that a value-based leadership approach is the best strategy to reduce turnover in fast-food organizations. FFM1 expressed, “my favorite strategy is like a big one, just lead by example.” FFM1 further explained the importance of setting the tone as a role model by highlighting the following: “Anything that I ask my employees to do, I get out there and do. I do it with as much energy and effort that I expect.” FFM2 agreed with FFM1 and stated, “I lead by example and do all of the things that they would normally do, it’s not beneath me.” Both FFM1 and FFM2 mentioned how they led from an empathetic standpoint by putting themselves in the shoes of their employees and following the “golden rule.” FFM3, FFM4, and FFM5 echoed both FFM1 and FFM2, highlighting that a leader promoting the golden rule while taking care of their subordinates increases subordinates’ respect for the leader and commitment to the organization. All participants expressed the importance of setting clear expectations while remaining humble in their leadership roles. Zhou and Li (2018) found that long-term employees are highly enticed by principled leaders and perceive humility as a desired leadership trait to follow. The stewardship characteristic of a servant leader displays an individual’s accountability and humility, which can appeal to employees and increase their organizational commitment, resulting in reduced turnover (Coetzer et al., 2017).

FFM1 and FFM2 voiced the importance of leading by example compared to enacting a traditional leadership approach. However, FFM5 did caution leaders to avoid an overtly companionable approach that complicates the subordinate/leader relationship.

FFM1 explained that being a traditional boss and unengaged was ineffective. FFM1 stated,

I think we as managers have to approach it with an open mind. How would we want our boss to handle our situation if we were employees? So, I think my word of advice to any boss would be just pay attention to detail of your employees. Try to understand or try to remember what it was like to be an employee yourself. We all had bosses that we didn't like. So, you know, we shouldn't walk in that mode just because we have the title. You know, we should try to break that barrier down, try to break that wheel, and try to change it.

FFM2 expressed his own resentment and the perceived resentment of others towards managers who dictate to or direct employees with little to no involvement at the workplace. FFM2 stated, “hands off managers made me resent them, pushed me away from the job, not wanting more hours, or work there.” FFM4 acknowledged that as a leader, a manager has to also display professionalism while working with others, which ultimately led to reduced turnover rates in his organization. FFM3 shared his belief that regardless of their position, employees are human and deserve to be treated with respect. Li et al. (2016) concluded that a leader’s behavior is an important factor in an employee’s turnover intention. The autocratic leadership strategy is bound to fail in many organizations because it leads to disengaged relationships between leaders and subordinates, which result in higher turnover rates due to a lack of employee satisfaction (Mazurek, 2022). The responses of the participants reinforced Huang et al.’s (2016)

assertion that servant leadership in a fast-food organization is a more desired approach by organizational members compared to other leadership approaches.

I also reviewed organizational documents relevant to a value-based leadership approach to mitigate turnover, and the findings aligned with the participant responses. FFM1 and FFM2 personnel policies specified that all employees, including management, must uphold ethical standards and treat all organizational members with respect. An electronic article from FFM4's organization stated that leaders should "try to show up each day with compassion, optimism, and a heart for service. Treat everyone with fairness, including your employees and customers." Additionally, FFM3's and FFM5's organizations' cultural policies and values emphasized serving their members, empowering members, embracing accountability, and cultivating stewardship. The organizational documents of these organizations further confirmed the theme of using a value-based leadership approach because they all associated with various elements and characteristic of a value-based leader.

The participants attributed their success in reducing turnover in their organizations to characteristics linked to this study's conceptual framework, which was servant leadership theory. As a value-based theory, the approach of a servant leader includes humility, accountability, authenticity, fairness, respect, and stewardship (Hendrikz & Engelbrecht, 2019). Sims and Morris (2018) explained that servant leaders are notorious for their display of genuineness and high morality. In this study, the participants' feedback aligned with Canavesi and Minelli (2022), who discussed the distinction of servant leaders compared to other leaders in terms of leading by example

and emphasized the importance of functioning as role models to avoid undesirable organizational outcomes such as high employee turnover rates.

## **Theme 2: Facilitate Effective Communication**

The second theme to emerge from participant responses was facilitating effective communication. Effective communication encompasses many aspects beyond conveying a message and includes active listening while providing a purpose. The behavior or approach of a leader nonverbally affirms how they are perceived by subordinates, which can impact their desired outcome (Sloan et al., 2020). All participants attested to the significance of open dialogue and developing rapport with employees. FFM5 expressed the importance of communicating appreciation to employees and noted that expressing gratitude for their hard work resulted in lower turnover rates. FFM1 explained that he used words of affirmation to show his team that he appreciated the work that they performed and noted that letting someone know that they have done a “good job” goes a long way. FFM1 further explained that both individual and group conversations were pivotal in developing long-term work relationships. Lyons and Bandura (2020) aligned with FFM1 and advised managers to make continuous effort in communicating with employees to strengthen their reliance on and commitment to their organization. FFM2 echoed FFM1 and explained that through authenticity when communicating, he could create a genuine relationship with employees. Findings that supported employee recognition reducing employee turnover were shared by several authors in literature. Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) described the servant leadership element of standing back and allowing employees to receive credit as an intrinsic motivator that can increase

job satisfaction. Rombaut and Guerry (2020) and Huning et al. (2020) found that standing back and effectively communicating praise while recognizing the efforts of employees curtail high turnover and fortify employees' commitment to their organizations.

FFM4 and FFM5 both voiced the importance of being an effective communicator to mitigate turnover rates. FFM2 stated that encouraging various forms of feedback also allowed him to identify areas to address and influence higher employee retention. Feedback areas include providing employees with appropriate criticism and understanding. A leader who exhibits the servant leadership characteristic of extending employees the proper level of forgiveness can increase their trust in their leader and organization (Kashyap & Rangnekar, 2016). Soliciting feedback also incorporates the voice of employees in decision making and empowers them as valued members in the organization (Gotsis, 2016). FFM2 also stated that corporate leaders were extremely supportive and were receptive to an open flow of communication. In alignment with the literature, Huang et al. (2016) concluded that CEOs in the fast-food industry who undertook servant leadership as a supportive leadership approach had more successful organizations compared to other corporate leaders.

FFM1 indicated that he facilitated effective communication in various aspects of perspectives, whether acting as a therapist, teacher, father figure, or supportive figure, or just being a listening ear. FFM1 stated, "a great rapport will make your employees want to stick around longer." FFM4 agreed with FFM1 and highlighted that they, as a manager, as well as their higher level manager, experienced lower rates of turnover due to their ability to build rapport with employees through one-on-one communication.

FFM4 also shared that he ensured transparency through open dialogue during meetings and ensuring that employees were informed on the status of the organization. FFM3 stated that he was able to talk an employee out of terminating their employment by addressing their problems and using a personal approach.

From the review of organizational documents, I found effective communication as an emerging theme. FFM5's organization's culture policy stated, "everyone's voice at the table matters." FFM1's employee handbook highlighted respectful communication amongst all organizational members. An electronic leadership article from FFM4 emphasized that leaders should "practice greeting everyone with warmth and positivity, and try to get to know something about them. Practice gratitude and take care of your own health." It also stated the need to encourage open communication. FFM3's organization's standards of business conduct stated that "we speak openly and listen for understanding." The review identified that the organizational documents aligned with the responses of participants, which confirmed the use of effective communication to reduce turnover.

The responses from the participants linked to servant leadership theory, which was the conceptual framework of this study. The participants indicated that effective communication contributed to the empowerment of their employees while heightening their trust through transparency. The participants, similarly, to servant leaders, imparted effective communication to empower and articulate clear expectations while actively listening to the needs of their employees. Like servant leaders, the participants extended communication with employees to subjects regarding their well-being and opportunities

for growth. In alignment with the literature review, the participants' responses aligned with Sloan et al. (2020), who asserted that servant leaders communicate humbly and authentically, aimed towards the interest of their followers, which contributes to their organizational commitment and lessens their turnover intention.

### **Theme 3: Facilitate Positive Culture and Family-Like Work Environment**

The third theme to emerge from data analysis of participants' interview responses and organizational data was facilitating both a positive culture and family-like work environment. All participants acknowledged that they facilitated both a positive and a productive culture to influence reduced employee turnover intentions. FFM3 emphasized that "the atmosphere of the store is extremely important. if we're not keeping 'em happy internally, they will find other places to work." FFM1 stated, "I try to create an atmosphere in the workplace and out of the workplace where they won't find anywhere else. And you know, it helps a lot." FFM4 articulated that reducing turnover rates correlated with his ability to influence a productive culture or atmosphere while motivating employees to do a good job. FFM5 echoed FF3 and FFM4, stating, "I think in today's age, that's what it is, is just making sure you have a fun work atmosphere." FFM5 further explained that in his experience a "good working atmosphere" outweighed higher pay for his employees. Leaders play a key role in influencing the direction of an organization's culture (Carter et al., 2019). FFM1 explained that changing the culture in a fast-food restaurant could be challenging and that how one is viewed as leader is important. He further elaborated that mutual respect must be established, followed by earning the buy-in of employees on his vision. Wang et al. (2018) found that the

behaviors and approaches of leaders guide the culture of organizations, which contributes greatly to their turnover rates. The participants all agreed that through positive influence on the organization's culture, they retained employees longer compared to exhibiting counterproductive behaviors that disrupt the work environment.

The participants also expressed the importance of a family-like work environment. Facilitating a positive and productive culture creates enjoyment and purpose for employees, thus increasing their organizational commitment (Yam et al., 2018). FFM3 highlighted the importance of caring for his employees, working with them, and motivating them. FFM3 stated, "we try to treat our managers, even our crew as family. And that seems to slow down the turnover." Similar to FFM3, FFM5 stated,

basically we just have the family approach where everybody that works for us is family and we treat 'em that way. But the thing that's helped us most and what we go by is that family first model. And again, it just means everybody in our stores that work for us, whether you're a manager or you're, you do dishes we treat you like family.

FFM2 expressed fulfilling the needs of his employees through consistent engagement and extending support beyond the work environment. FFM2 also indicated that he even supported his employees who left his organization to pursue other endeavors and later return. FFM2 stated,

They end up coming back to my organizations stating that they really liked me as a manager and the environment that I set. They admitted to trying somewhere else

and it wasn't the same. I know that this is working because I have a bunch of returning employees.

Akdol and Arikboga (2017) aligned with FFM2, acknowledging that leaders who courageously challenge the traditional approach with employees drive exceptional results and intensify organizational commitment. The participants all asserted that a positive atmosphere and a sense of community through advancing a family dynamic amongst members yielded more desirable results in retaining employees compared to neglecting the culture of their organizations.

I also reviewed organizational documents relevant to facilitating a positive culture and family-like work environment to mitigate turnover, and the findings aligned with the participant responses. FFM5's organization listed "treat each other as family" and "have fun" as two main points of their culture. One of FFM5's organizational values stated, "We aim to raise the bar, inspire, motivate, mentor and make an impact. We strive to be a force of good and a source of fun." FFM3's organization's values highlighted serving their people first and having integrity while operating with a sense of community and family. An electronic article from FFM4's organizations stated, "build your team's vibe. Ultimately, it's all about the ability of your staff to mesh and work well together to create a positive work environment. Create a safe and positive work environment." The mission and vision statements from both FFM1 and FFM2's organizations highlighted the growth of their members, supporting their needs, and collaborative work within the organization. This theme identified in the organizational documents aligned with the responses of

participants, which confirmed the facilitation of a positive culture and family-like environment to reduce turnover.

All participants articulated many actions that align with a servant leadership approach to organizational culture. FFM1 and FFM3 explained how they did their best to show employees that they are appreciated by rewarding them with meals, outings, and other fun activities. They further explained that their employees' longevity of employment was a result of developing an engaging culture that is also inclusive. In alignment with the literature review, the findings aligned with Lapointe and Vandenberghe (2018), who found that servant leaders mitigate antisocial behaviors in organizations and increase the performance and commitment of organizational members through leading a positive culture. FFM5 stressed the importance of fostering positive relationships among all employees to maintain high moral in his organization. FFM2 and FFM4 added that foresight allows them to assess the individual needs of their employees and adapt as leaders to their preferred style of training or learning. The findings of this study aligned with the conceptual framework of Greenleaf's servant leadership theory. Greenleaf (1970) explained that servant leaders lead through service and support of their subordinates. Servant leaders can guide the culture of organizations to result in positive outcomes and fulfill a sense of community among members (Wright, 2021) Based on the participants feedback, they all act on their own volition to ensure that the culture of their organizations is prioritized based on the necessity of their people, while strengthen a family-like community with their employees.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

Employee turnover is an element that fast-food industry leaders are responsible for managing. Leaders in the fast-food industry have succumbed to higher employee turnover rates compared to many other industries (Adnan et al. 2018) and endure instability within their organizations due to insufficient retention rates (Taşpınar & Türkmen, 2019). Fast-food leaders must take action to mitigate high rates of turnover or, their organizations will suffer the direct costs of recruitment and the indirect cost of insufficient work environments lacking skilled employees (Lyons & Bandura, 2020). Leaders must account for the efficiency of their retentions strategies to their higher leaders (Al Mamun & Hasan, 2017), which they can improve through implementing effective strategies based on assessments of their work environment's climate, communication plans, and employee feedback (Lyons & Bandura, 2020) The themes of this study can assist managers of fast-food industry organizations in implementing leadership strategies through elements of servant leadership to reduce high employee turnover rates, while enriching the work environment and lives of employees. Wright (2021) indicated that leaders who adapt an effective leadership approach, that influences their organizations culture and prioritize the well-being of employees, are advantageous in reducing turnover and sustaining retention. The findings of this study could assist fast-food industry leaders seeking to limit turnover because it consists of effective strategies shared by general managers who successfully reduced turnover in their fast-food organizations, furthered the growth of employees, and productivity of their organizations.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The implications for social change from this study could result in reducing unemployment rates, enhance the livelihood of employees, and an increase of monetary and volunteer resources to social programs within communities. Skelton et al. (2019) reported that the effects of high employee turnover negatively impact an organization's profitability, well-being of employees, and adversely affect the socioeconomic state of communities. Organizations suffering from high turnover cannot provide a productive climate to employees or afford to invest in social programs within their communities. Vasquez (2014) highlighted that the lack of economic growth globally was a result of high turnover rates and increased unemployment especially in hospitality industry organizations. Leaders who reduce turnover in their organizations also mitigate costs that can contribute to the growth of the socioeconomic status of their communities and increase the probability of employees' involvement in positive community relations.

### **Recommendations for Action**

Fast-food organizations can mitigate high employee turnover and increase retention through appropriate actions. Fast-food industry leaders should be cognizant of their effectiveness as leaders in their organizations and how to implement strategies that create successful organizational outcomes for reduced turnover. The participants of this study have used successful leadership strategies linked to the elements of servant leadership to reduce high employee turnover in their fast-food organizations.

The three themes revealed from this study are also the three applicable recommendations to fast-food owners and managers struggling with high employee

turnover. The first recommendation is that fast-food organizational leaders should institute a leadership approach encompassing servant leadership elements for managers to follow. Fast-food industry leaders should aim lead by example in their organizations. A value-based leadership approach will require leaders to act as role models and exude unquestionable morality. Employees appreciate respectable leaders; they are more satisfied in their organization when led under a value-based approach such as servant leadership and are less likely to terminate employment.

The second recommendation is that fast-food organizational leaders should implement effective communication practices among all employees within their organizations. Fast-food industry leaders should also facilitate effective communication and incorporate communication plans in their organizations. Leaders can advance lasting relationships with positive reinforcement through effective praise, constructive criticism, and active listening. Leaders can empower employees while using their feedback to increase trust among organizational members.

The final recommendation is that fast-food organizational leaders should implement a positive and productive culture in their organizations. Leaders can ensure employee engagement through empowerment, intrinsically reward employees through words of affirmation, and develop them as future leaders. A leader who affords their members with opportunities for growth, motivates their decision to remain in that organization. Leaders must exhibit both positive and productive behaviors in their organizations because employees perceive the culture of the organization based on their view of their leaders. Employees commit longer to organizations where they are provided

a purpose, a sense of belonging, and have a positive work environment. Further dissemination of this study will be available through ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Database for future scholars and academic professionals.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The participants of this study were five fast food industry managers who were interviewed to explore their viewpoints on reducing turnover rates in their organizations. First, I recommend that future scholars examine leadership strategies using survey data while conducting a quantitative research study. The second limitation was the participants' managerial viewpoint of successful turnover reduction may vary. Additionally, I recommend a phenomenological design be used to explore an in-depth personal meaning of managers' experiences with employee turnover. The third limitation was the variation of experience level of participating fast-food industry leaders in reducing turnover. A two-year minimum of managerial experience was a requirement of this study. Future researchers could expand the minimum managerial experience criteria to produce results of additional strategies.

### **Reflections**

This has been a journey filled with an array of emotions, time, and energy. I am exhilarated to complete the academic requirement of becoming a Doctor of Business Administration. I am even more excited to be the first doctor of three family generations. I am thankful of for the journey and the opportunity to pursue this scholarly level of lifelong learning.

## **Conclusion**

The need to reduce turnover is relevant to all industries but one of the most difficult conundrums for many leaders in the fast-food industry. The findings of this study indicated that fast-food industry leaders could alleviate high turnover rates through a value-based leadership approach such as servant leadership, facilitating effective communication, and facilitating a positive culture and family-like work environment. The feedback from participant interviews thoroughly aligned with the servant leadership theory. The findings show that reducing high turnover rates is attainable through leadership that incorporates elements of servant leadership. Leaders have the responsibility of influencing their organizations and ultimately managing turnover, I suggest leaders incorporate these findings to curtail high turnover rates.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Date of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Respondent Number: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Introduce self to the participant.
2. Introduce the research question, the purpose of the study and answer any initial questions the participant may have.
3. Thank the participant for their participation in the study.
4. Review the informed consent form and answer any questions the participant may have.
5. Provide the participant with a copy of the informed consent form for their personal records and review.
6. Begin recording the interview.
7. Introduce the participant using their respondent number, the date and time of the interview.
8. Start the interview using the interview questions.
9. Ask any follow-up questions.
10. End the interview and stop the recording. Explain to the participant of the member checking and transcription review process.
11. Thank the participant for the participation in the study and provide the participant with relevant contact information should they have any follow-up questions or concerns.

## Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What strategies have you used to reduce employee turnover?
2. How did you assess the effectiveness of the strategies for reducing employee turnover?
3. What strategies did you find worked to best to reduce employee turnover?
4. What strategies were least effective in reducing employee turnover?
5. What were the significant barriers to implementing strategies for reducing employee turnover?
6. How did you address the significant barriers of reducing employee turnover?
7. What else would you like to share regarding strategies for reducing employee turnover that we have not addressed?

## Appendix C: Invitation Letter

Date

Company YY

Address

**Research Study - Reducing Employee Turnover in the Fast-food Industry through Leadership Strategies**

Dear Participant:

You are invited to participate in a research study that will explore fast-food industry managers' leadership strategies for reducing employee turnover rates. I am pursuing a Doctorate Degree in Business Administration with a specialization in Leadership from Walden University, and this study is the final step in my pursuit of this degree. I am conducting this research to explore successful strategies that managers of fast-food organizations use to reduce high employee turnover rates. I am inviting you to participate in this study because your views on the employee turnover and your experience on impacts high employee turnover rates may positively influence the identification of the successful strategies to reduce employee turnover rates in the fast-food industry. The results of this study may assist managers of fast-food industry organizations to develop strategies to reduce high employee turnover rates to enrich the work environment and lives of employees.

I am inviting fast-food industry leaders with established leadership experience to participate in this study. The participant selected would have effectively applied leadership strategies to reduce high employee turnover rates in a fast-food organization. I will appreciate the opportunity to interview with you for 30 minutes or more to explore successful strategies for high employee turnover rates. The interviews will be through Zoom, and audio recorded. You are free to decline to participate for any reason. If you decide to join the study, you may still withdraw from the study. I will schedule the interview date and time according to your availability.

The company name and participants' names will remain confidential and will be not disclosed to other entities. There is no cost to you if you decide to participate in this study. I am unable to compensate your efforts, though I will appreciate and thank you for participation.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please reply to [terrell.brown1@waldenu.edu](mailto:terrell.brown1@waldenu.edu) or call me directly at 626-991-1570. I look forward to hearing from you and meeting you in person soon. Thank you for your consideration and time.

Sincerely,

Terrell Brown