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Hiring, Onboarding, and Assignments in Effective Academic Advisor Staffing

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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Industrial and Organizational Psychology

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Abstract

The higher education market has intensified, especially with online programs, which are becoming mainstream at a steady pace. Institutions are using academic advisors to support online students because advisors are uniquely positioned to achieve student-centric learning objectives, contributing to institutions' sustainable competitive advantages. The essential role of an academic advisor is still not recognized as a career track, making effective talent management in an advising department challenging. A phenomenological study was conducted to obtain the experiences and perceptions of 13 seasoned academic advisors using semistructured interviews. The interview questions focus on the phenomenon of hiring, onboarding, and assigning advisors; therefore, providing transcripts that were examined for themes, concepts, and patterns using Giorgi's five steps to analyze data in a descriptive phenomenology study. The participants expressed a reoccurring theme that recruiting is siloed and always a challenge, particularly to those institutions that provided limited support for this department. Other emerging concepts were inconsistent onboarding practices and the need to improve training for the advising role. In addition, there were unexpected outcomes, like working in the education field in some form before becoming an academic advisor, on-the-job training was used extensively but unstructured, and participants ended up as advisors fortuitously. Understanding the lived experiences of these participants can provide helpful information for institutions' talent management that supports SCA and promote positive social change. This study will positively impact students' success for those who pursue online higher education.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Online universities and colleges provide a platform for adult learners to return to further their education, and online education is on track to become mainstream by 2025 (Palvia et al., 2018). In the Fall of 2017, over three million students were pursuing a graduate degree, and a third of this group were enrolled in an online institution instead of a traditional brick and mortar campus (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2017). NCES projects that graduate enrollment will increase by 3% before 2028. Increased requirements for human capital in the United States have been a driving force for more people to enroll in graduate school in recent years (Shepherd & Nelson, 2012); however, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has created a major surge in online enrollments and greater demand in this competitive market.

Sustainable competitive advantage (SCA) is achievable through employees who can generate maximum value in a harmonious process where it is an intangible asset (Butt et al., 2020). Hwang and Choi (2019) indicated that globalization increased competition among higher education sector and to stay relevant, an institution must provide efficient and satisfying services to attract more students and enhance its long-term sustainability. Because higher education due to market forces is becoming more of a service industry, it requires maintaining effective human capital to provide a competitive edge based on the SCA principle. According to Mahdi et al. (2018), the main source of competitive advantage is knowledge, and employees are a key element in obtaining new information. Academic advisors’ priority is to connect with as many students as possible, which puts them in a unique position to fully understand the students’ academic and personal needs (Zarges, et al., 2018). The advisor can use these knowledges to recommend policies, practices, and strategies that are proactive in addressing students' persistence to graduation, which is the intangible asset for higher education institutions that positively affects student satisfaction and perceived image of the academic institution (Hwang & Choi, 2019).

Academic advisors are a crucial element for institutions of higher education (Hart-Baldridge, 2020). Academic advising is indispensable because it can address students' persistence with their education by providing interpersonal and instructional interaction that connects them to resources for academic and personal needs (Craft et al., 2016). Unfortunately institutional leaders underutilize them to achieve SCA because upper management adopted the institution-centered culture rather than student-centered (Steele & White, 2019). The collaboration between the students and their academic advisors is the key element, yet untapped, to recognize an academic advisor's significant role within higher education (Steele & White, 2019). Mann (2020) found that higher education institutions across the globe are still having difficult challenges to engage students in quality advising.

The increase demand for online education presents an opportunity for higher education, but the standard of operation for institutions must evolve with the demand (Palvia et al, 2018). Studies have shown that engaging students tends to have positive outcomes, but it requires quality advising to keep them engaged (Cross, 2018; Lema & Agrusa, 2019). Distance learners have greater challenge with engagement because they do not have face-to-face contact with their professors (Dumford & Miller, 2018; Kara et al., 2019), so many online institutions provide full time academic advisors to address these difficulties. Institutions that want to staff a team of qualified academic advisors may have roadblocks because academic advising is not considered a profession (McGill, 2019), and hiring for the right person becomes challenging. By focusing on the role of hiring, onboarding, and assignments in effective academic advisor staffing, institutions could enhance their capability to address the obstacles that prevent students from engaging with their academic institution.

Problem Statement

Larson et al. (2018) noted that there is a lack of a cohesive definition for the advising role. Without a shared common understanding, purpose, or activity for the academic advising position, it is difficult to understand or even acknowledge the profession (McGill, 2018). Therefore, individuals from other departments; like supervisors, human resource officers, and institutional colleagues not familiar with advising are placed in roles that influence the practice of academic advising (Larson et al., 2018), perhaps explaining why institutions do not have consensus to an onboarding strategy for this position. This approach presents a few challenges according to Bauer's (2010) four critical building blocks to a successful onboarding strategy: compliance, clarification, culture, and connection. First, data from a general onboarding strategy distort the clarification of a position, so it cannot clearly define an academic advisor's job description for recruitment practice. Second, there can be a mismatch in connection to vital interpersonal relationship within an organization to successfully conduct training and performance measurement. Lastly, general onboarding does not address the cultural differences between administrative staffs and academic advising if there are any differences. Organizations may have difficulties identifying talent appropriately if its talent management (TM) system, which includes onboarding, is the same for all employees (Tetik, 2016).

Onboarding is the process of developing a significant employer-employee relationship, but it all starts with internal marketing (Butt et al., 2020). Internal marketing is the employer's branding to attract and retain talents by bringing the faith in the organization among the employees (Vel et al., 2018). Internal marketing emphasizes that employees are a first market, so they feel valued and appreciated; therefore, they provide excellent service to customers, or in this case students (Santos & Goncalves, 2018). Consequently, human resource (HR) managers who are primarily responsible for effective onboarding, must consider internal marketing strategies to ensure acceptable outcomes are achieved (Huang, 2020). Karambelkar and Bhattacharya (2017) suggested to use change management strategies to improve onboarding processes by using awareness, desire, knowledge, ability, and reinforcement or the “ADKAR” method.

Students value their professors and see them as the most accessible resource because they have content knowledge (earned degrees), experiences, and pedagogical techniques, which are fundamental for all higher education institutions (Vespia et al., 2018). However, retaining students or being service-oriented is not their strong point (Zhang et al., 2017), especially online/adjunct/part-time faculty who do not have face -to -face connection with their learners. Faculties, particularly at large online institutions do not have the time or training for quality advising, so nonfaculty fulltime advisors fill in the gap (Vespia et al., 2018). Researchers have called for more studies concerning advisors' behavior, characteristics, and practices to solidify their role in the academic world (Larson et al., 2018; McGill, 2019; van den Wijngaard, 2019). High-quality advising and personal mentoring is the key to positive student experience (Mann, 2020), so investing in effective onboarding for academic advisors would be a logical strategy to pursue.

Larson et al. (2018) stated that "academic advising applies knowledge of the field to empower students and campus and community members to navigate academic interactions related to higher education successfully" (p. 89). The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) summarized the role of academic advisers as a person who synthesizes and contextualizes students' education experiences within the frameworks of their aspiration, abilities, and lives to extend learning beyond campus boundaries and timeframes (NACADA, 2006). Based on these two definitions of academic advising, a nonfaculty fulltime advisor's main objective is to communicate and learn from their students before informing and teaching them methodically about resources and techniques for individuals to succeed in higher education.

Onboarding is a necessity and can result in higher retention and productivity if implemented effectively (Karambelkar & Bhattacharya, 2017). Ineffective onboarding creates undesirable outcomes like placing the wrong person in the advising role and contributes to the ever-challenging process to engage students in quality advising (Mann, 2020). Student-centric onboarding is ideal for higher education institutions to stay competitive, and this objective is not achievable without academic advisors' contributions

(Joslin, 2018). Unfortunately, institutions are overly relying on corporate budgeting models to measure effectiveness, which encourages institution-centric principles and potentially causing unfavorable desired outcomes for higher education (Steele & White, 2019). Therefore, leadership should make decisions based on evidence for appropriate intervention within the talent acquisition department for effective academic advising and lead their organization toward a positive cultural change (van den Wijngaard, 2019). Consequently, there is a need for more research in talent acquisition, internal marketing, and onboarding in the growing field of academic advising, especially for higher education institutions that offer online programs using part-time faculty as adjunct professors.

Purpose of the Study

I conducted a qualitative study to examine the lived experiences of academic advisors regarding the initial stages of the TM process in terms of hiring, onboarding, and staffing. I explored advisors' perceived impact on academic advisor job performance**.** The results of this study could provide critical data for academic institutions in establishing policies, process, and procedures supporting talent acquisition.

Research Questions

I addressed the following two research questions (RQs) in this study:

RQ1: What lived experiences do academic advisors encounter during initial talent acquisition, to include recruitment, hiring, onboarding, initial training, and early staffing?

RQ2: How do academic advisors perceive the impact of initial talent acquisition on their job performance?

I used these two open-ended research questions to capture the experiences and perspectives of academic advisors regarding their institution's policies and procedures to recruit, onboard, and assign academic advisors to their position. The answers from these questions included data about the participants' ideal strategies for effectiveness and identify potential weaknesses to improve the institution's initial talent acquisition.

Conceptual Framework

I based this study on the principle of SCA because the advisor-student interaction is the relationship building that empowers students and provides valuable, rare, nonsubstitutable resources for the academic institution to have SCA. SCA must start with an employee-focused paradigm in the advising department before it can strategize their TM plan to achieve SCA. Figure 1 is a visual representation of employee-focus procedures are the foundation to an effective TM approach that supports SCA. With the introduction of strategic academic advising management (SAAM) method, higher education institutions have some guidance to effectively invest in the academic advising department to improve practices, behaviors, and equipment that support advisors' ability to build that advisor-student relationship (Joslin, 2018). According to the resource-based view, SCA is not achievable without an effective TM practice that includes attracting, developing, motivating, managing, rewarding, and retaining of talents (Heinen & O'Neill, 2004). Tetik (2016), believed that current TM studies view workers as an economic asset, but ignore the social capital, which hinders the ability to identify key qualities to a position. Literature in academic advising supports Tetik's belief, especially not knowing the social aspect of advisors. Tetik further stated that most literature in TM focuses on the philosophy of people, practices, and position approaches.

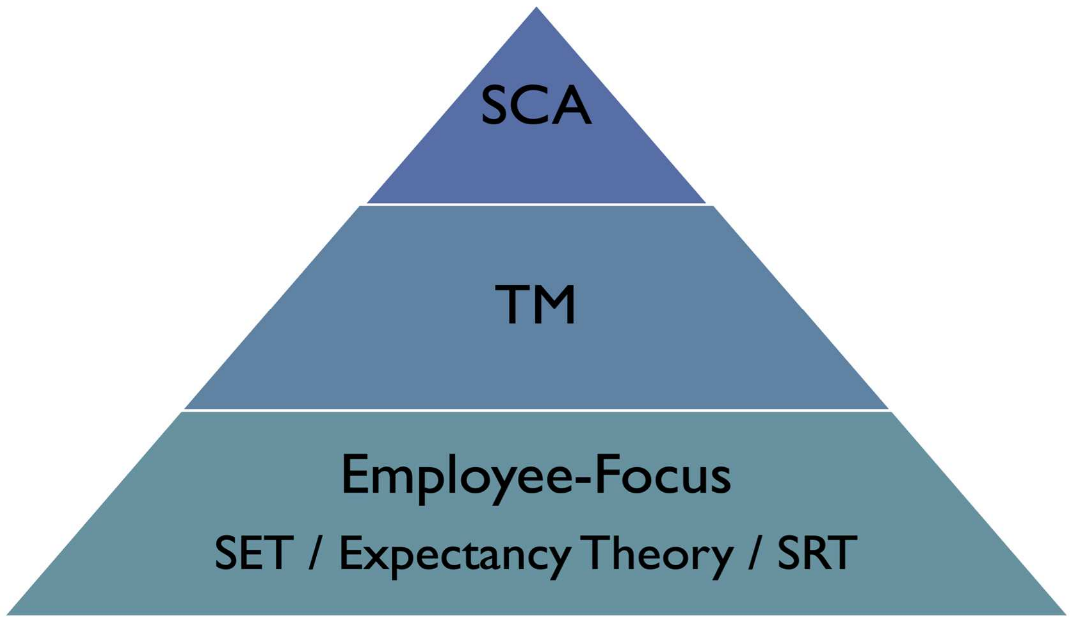
Collings and Mellahi (2009) introduced the strategic pools approach where practitioners identify strategies to pool talents and manage human capital as a collective. Effective TM cannot exist without strategic onboarding that includes internal marketing because student satisfaction can only be achieved if employees (advisors) are also satisfied (Santos & Goncalves, 2018). Because higher education institutions employ academic advisors to provide a service to students, then advisors with their direct connection are the gateway to understanding student's needs. According to Huang (2020), internal marketing is playing a significant role in HR management to implement employee-focused procedures because employees are the one who produce effective service strategies that ultimately benefit external customers. By interviewing academic advisors, this research should produce data about common TM approach and recognize shortfalls within the ideal strategy to obtain SCA.

I used an employee-focused paradigm in this study. Organizations that value employee-focused policies must understand the social exchange theory (SET), the expectancy theory, and socialization resource theory (SRT). SET explains the relationship between the employer and the employee through psychological contract with one receiving monetary goods (employee) for providing their services (Caldwell & Peters, 2017). The psychological contract is typically unwritten, but it starts once an employer hires an individual. Caldwell and Floyd (2014) proposed that both parties will have to meet their obligations to build trust and commitment to create an organizational culture that foster creativity and innovation. Upon starting a new position, employees undergo the expectancy theory by determining how they benefit as an organization member and how they are valued through promised outcomes (Shea-Van Fossen & Vredenburgh, 2014).

The organization’s goal is to generate value and employees expect those type of effort from their employer, especially new talents. Effective onboarding is the critical component in building this type of value if it uses SRT. Saks and Gruman (2012) stated that SRT is where employees interact with leadership and peers to adjust into the new role demands, reduce stress, and quickly reach maximum productivity. According to Cranmer et al. (2016), SRT studies draw from psychology, management, and communication disciplinary framework. Onboarding experiences would comprise of experience with organizational training, task characteristics, social support, and leadership (Gupta et al., 2018). The results from studying the advising department may show which areas to improve or modify employee satisfaction through employee-focused strategies. The end goal is to recruit and retain the right talent for the advising role to achieve SCA in the educational field.

Figure 1

SCA Theoretical Pyramid



Nature of the Study

I conducted a qualitative study using a phenomenological approach. According to Starks and Trinidad (2007), phenomenology can capture the lived experiences people by interviewing those who were involved in a specific event. By interviewing academic advisors, I was able to describe and analyze their lived experiences regarding higher education institutions common TM methods and build a deeper understanding on how this phenomenon influences the advisors' performance, perception, and commitment to the organization. I This study was necessary because there is a need for more research in talent acquisition, internal marketing, and onboarding in the growing field of academic advising because educational industries can adapt their TM processes based on empirical evidence to recruit, retain, and assign the right person for the academic advising role.

I used semistructured interviews with open-ended questions so that participants could freely express their feeling and beliefs about the current TM system within their institution. Zoom was used to conduct the interviews because most advisors worked remotely in different States; plus, virtual meetings were required due to COVID-19 pandemic social distancing protocols. I used purposive sampling to recruit advisors from the NACADA site and its social media. All participants were screened before being selected to be part of the research and required to be active academic advisors with 3 or more years of experience. I discovered common themes and contexts associated with recruiting and retaining academic advisors for online institutions and to conduct a comparative analysis to the framework of SCA.

Definitions

The following terms are defined for purpose of this study:

Academic advisor: Any academic institution staff member (faculty, administrative, or nonfaculty fulltime advisor) who applies knowledge of the field to empower students and campus and community members to navigate academic interaction related to higher education successfully (Larson et al., 2018).

Appreciative advising: The practice of developing student's educational path through proactive student contact and utilizing their strengths while offering resources for their weaknesses to improve their learning experience (Bloom et al., 2008).

Internal marketing: A relationship development strategy for the purpose of knowledge renewal where (1) mutual values between participants are exchange, (2) requires a process of learning activity, (3) learning activity and knowledge renewal intertwine, (4) internal marketing requires knowledge renewal, and (5) affects external market outcomes (Ballantyne, 2003).

Onboarding: The process of helping new hires adjust to social and performance aspects of their new jobs as quickly as possible to become productive for the organization especially using the four C's: compliance, clarification, culture, and connection (Bauer, 2010).

Student Centric Learning (SCL): A meta-concept that depicted into three distinct conceptions – "a pedagogic concept to foster individual learning, a cultural frame for developing communities of learning, and a lever supporting system." (Klemencic, 2017 p. 73).

Sustainable competitive advantage (SCA): The differences between one company and its competitors that is felt in the marketplace and competitors cannot, or will not, take action to close the gap of capability (Coyne, 2001).

Talent management (TM): The practice of getting the right person in the right job at the right time through workforce planning, succession planning, employee development and career management (Cappelli & Keller, 2014).

Assumptions

Creely (2018) noted that the phenomenological approach to research is grounded in the consciousness of the individual and the researcher can learn from their point-of-view as long as they assume the following: (a) all participants are free to answer the interview questions honestly without fear of repercussion, (b) participants have basic knowledge and/or experienced their institution's recruitment, training, and onboarding practices, (c) participants understood the importance of placing the right person to the advising role. Academic advisors with their unique position in understanding the critical role of an advisor were selected for this research. Participation in this study was voluntary, and I assumed that they remembered their personal onboarding experience and observed new advisors' proficiency when they joined the advising team.

Limitations

I explored and described the lived experiences of a selected group of academic advisors. The participants provided rich data regarding online institutions' hiring, onboarding, and assignments to its academic advising department. The outcome did not support the findings to be generalizable because it only pertains to online institutions. The number of participants cannot represent the entire field of academic advising within all higher education institutions. Each institution across the United States will have disparities on how they use the academic advising department and there is no one-size-fits-all strategy to maximize the advisors' capabilities. Another limitation of this study was the contributors' recollection of their own onboarding and TM experiences, especially those who have been with their academic institution for over three years. People's perspectives and beliefs change over time and this study does not account for the variation due to maturity. In addition to changing perceptions of individuals, it is possible that the institution made changes to their policies and procedures within the advising department without updating its written guidelines. The final limitation of this study was social desirability bias. Bergen and Labonte (2020) defined social desirability as, "the tendency to present oneself and one's social context in a way that is perceived to be socially acceptable, but not wholly reflective of one's reality" (p. 783). I work for an online university as an academic advisor; by interviewing colleagues in the same field, I might have created social desirability.

Delimitations

This study was limited to academic advisors who have experienced the onboarding and TM procedures and observed new hires transitioning into their role as academic advisor. I selected these participants to their unique academic advising position. Only those who were in the advising role could offer relevant information to support the trustworthiness of this study.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study include critical data that could be used for designing processes, developing procedures, and establishing policies for the TM of academic advisors, especially those tied to recruiting, hiring, onboarding, and training that impact job performance. The outcomes of the study uncovered processes that guide placing the right candidate in an academic advising position who can foster a students' persistence and motivation to transform themselves to become scholar-practitioners who can promote to positive social change (Zhang et al., 2019). The data collected included insights about an academic institution's employer branding procedures, whether it provided an advising department economic and psychological benefits to enhance student support and improve recruitment, retention, and commitment (Butt et al., 2020). Insights directly from an academic advising department could add significant knowledge to recognize an advisor's essential role where higher education institutions can potentially agree on a standard of practice for recruiting, onboarding, and training purposes to achieve SCA. This research examined the experiences and perspectives of academic advisors to promote desirable outcomes.

Most research about academic advising agreed that higher education institutions have tremendous pressure to retain and graduate students and the advising role plays a significant part in addressing the challenges (Noaman & Ahmed, 2015; Thomas & McFarlane, 2018; Tudor, 2018; Zarges et al., 2018). Higher education institutions cannot sustain their platform with the traditional student-deficiency paradigm where the system identifies areas where students are falling short and provide interventions to improve retention (Thomas & McFarlane, 2018). Researchers continued stating that student-learning partnership paradigm is the crucial element for long-term sustainability for schools and it is not possible without investing in academic advising. Zarges et al., (2018) stated that if advising is done correctly, it will improve the student learning experience by developing an institutional culture that fosters suitable advising structure that will address serious issues in higher education. There is a strong governmental push to shift from putting responsibilities on the students for their education to holding academic institutions accountable for students' success; so, improving recruitment, onboarding, and retention for qualified advisors are pivotal for SCA and capturing public support as an institution that focuses on students' best interest (Tudor, 2018).

Summary and Transition

Academic advisors play an important role for higher education institutions to sustain longevity (Craft et al., 2016; Hart-Baldridge, 2020; Larson et al., 2018; Steele &

White, 2019). Academic advisors are in a unique position to fully understand students' motivation, skill sets, and needs to succeed in higher education, but it requires quality advising (Hwang & Choi, 2019; Zarges, et al., 2018). Current literature validates the importance of collaboration between the students and their academic advisors, but Mann (2020) stated that higher education institutions still have challenges to engage students in quality advising; so, finding and placing the right person in the advising role can improve this critical connection.

Effective TM will include onboarding, internal marketing, and strategic assignment (Butt et al., 2020; Karambelkar & Bhattacharya, 2017; Santos & Goncalves, 2018). Since there is a lack of cohesive definition for the advising role (Larson et al., 2018), it is difficult to plan and implement an effective TM strategy without understanding and acknowledging the crucial role (McGill, 2018). Therefore, there is a need for more research in TM in the growing field of fulltime academic advisor. The current study collected interview responses to identify themes and context on various online academic institutions' hiring, onboarding, and assignment procedures for successful academic advisor by interviewing those who have firsthand experiences. The data provide knowledge for higher education institutions to select, train, and place the right person for the critical role of academic advisor.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of academic advising from the history of advising to current trend on servicing students' expectation. It explains the strategy on searching the existing literature and how the conceptual framework was formulated. It also specifies a potential gap in literature regarding hiring, onboarding, and assigning effective employees to the academic advising role. Lastly, an outline of the theoretical framework for onboarding, internal marketing, and talent acquisition are postulated to support the validity of this research was presented.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology for this research and explains the research design. The best method for this research is the phenomenological approach and the chapter provides the rationale for selecting this technique and its appropriateness. It also stipulates the researcher's role, research questions, and the process of collecting data. Finally, this chapter addresses the trustworthiness, ethical implication, and the process of protecting all participants while creating a safe comfortable environment to allow true in-depth narrative of their lived experiences.

Chapter 4 reiterated the research questions and described the participants demographics before laying out the selection process. Next, it provided the data analysis process in a systematic approach that produces codes, themes, and unit of meanings. It used the participants' responses to align with the findings and explained the outcomes from the study. A few unexpected outcomes were exposed in this chapter as well while summarizing the results from the interviews.

Chapter 5 delivers a discussion about the results from the study and provided the researcher's viewpoint. An interpretation of the findings is added to this section that is grounded to the conceptual framework. Thereafter, it presents a conclusion to tie the outcomes to theories that implicates positive social change before providing recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Hiring, onboarding, and assigning employees are basic functions for any sustainable business, but the process can be different from one organization to another. Karambelkar and Bhattacharya (2017) indicated that implementing effective hiring and onboarding practices foster benefits from employee retention to higher productivity. Appropriate intervention from the TM team requires empirical description about the job because pivotal positions should be defined before developing criteria for talent acquisition (Tetik, 2016).

Bauer (2010) asserted it would be difficult to address the four critical building blocks of compliance, clarification, culture, and connection leading to a successful onboarding strategy without a clear depiction of the job. Universities encountered these problems with the role of academic advisor because there is a lack of a cohesive definition for this essential position (Larson et al., 2018). Academic advisors play a critical role with students' engagement, which is the necessary component for student retention and positive student satisfaction (Craft et al., 2016; Cross, 2018, Leman & Agrusa, 2019). Therefore, researching talent acquisition and onboarding in the growing field of academic advising is vital because leadership needs evidence to decide on an appropriate intervention (van den Wijngaard, 2019).

Literature Research Strategy

I used the following databases to find literature for this review: PsycINFO, SAGE, NACADA, and Walden University Library. I used the following search terms: *academic advisors*, *sustainable competitive advantage*, *onboarding*, and *talent* *management*. A combination of words such as *student success*, *student counselor*, *job description*, *advisor retention*, and *effective advising* were used to narrow the scope and focus solely on higher education. I linked Google Scholar to the Walden Library to improve search criteria and allowing natural language to broaden the exploration. I met with a Walden Library staff when my search became sparse, and they provided recommendation to generate more articles related to the research topic in question.

The above research strategies were necessary for me to initially focused on the purpose of academic advising and how advisors influence the success of students in higher education. The list of scholars from the initial search results overwhelmingly agreed that academic advisors are a critical factor to university's sustainable success, but there is no consensus on their job description. The outcomes from utilizing further combination of terms provided more literature that closely resemble the theories and practices for TM in the academia field, which pinpoint an empirical assertion to explore the topic of hiring, onboarding, and assigning effective academic advisors.

Academic Advising

Quality advising is the key component to engage students with their educational institution and available resources, which improve students' learning experience to enable confident, capability, and critical thinking (Mann, 2020). The responsibility of advising students was originally placed on faculties, but researchers have noted that faculties are burdened by other responsibilities; plus, the lack of training for effective advising and the additional time commitment truly discourage their willingness to serve as advisors (Zhang, et al., 2019). According to Hossler et al. (2009), university faculties focus on teaching and researching because they are not incentivized to provide high-quality advising especially for those institutions (particularly online universities) that hires more adjuncts and parttime faculties.

White (2020) posited that nonfaculty fulltime academic advising was introduced after World War II when veterans returned and wanted to further their education, which increased the demand for special interventions from academic advisors. White continued stating that academic advising started its work without any substantive theoretical underpinnings, so the expectation was based on prescriptive advising or telling a student what courses to take. Due to globalization that brought fierce competition in higher education, students are demanding more personalization which requires high-quality advising services (Mann, 2020). This changing expectation placed more values and responsibilities on academic advisors because they can influence service quality aspects such as reliabilities, responsiveness, empathy, and assurance (Hwang & Choi, 2019). Prescriptive advising model is no longer the standard because it will not address the service quality aspects, so academic advising had to evolve.

The evolution of academic advising started when institutions acknowledged that theories of learning must include student development to meet the demand for individualized attention for learners (NACADA History, n.d.). For academic advising to evolve it needed a place to support the growing field. NACADA provided a home for the scholarship of advising and a well-established and respected venue for publication (McGill, 2019). Van den Wijngaard (2019) reviewed current literature about academic advising and concluded that it is a discipline of praxis where theories and practice go together to develop the advising responsibilities. He explained how researching academic advising can start with theories that create new practices or begin with practice before describing the connection to a theory. Van de Wijngaard posits to observe reliable strategies when advising students and possibly connect practices to the theory of student-centric learning (SCL; Klemencic, 2017).

Currently, academic advising is not officially considered a profession even with an established organization for the scholarship of advising with many years of scholarly research (White, 2020). McGill (2019) conducted a literature review of why the field of academic advising never became a profession. He defined professionalization within the U.S. standards and presented all the barriers that academic advising must address. The five barriers are as follows: (a) the need to further define the field, (b) the role of the professional association, (c) the training and required education needed to perform the advising role, (d) personal and occupational autonomy from other professional entities, and (e) the lack of a consistent home for advising since NACADA is the only association for academic advising, and they lack the scholarship to set consensus parameters. McGill (2019) asserted that more research is necessary to solidify advisers' practices, characteristics, and knowledge to advance the field and demonstrate its impact and effectiveness to stakeholders.

Lema and Agrusa (2019) further explained a predictable evolution of academic advising by exploring cognitive technologies that assist transactional and instructional tasks anywhere at any time for students; therefore, academic advisors must increase their level of contextual understanding on a continuum to facilitate learning-centered goals.

Lema and Agrusa (2019) added more evidence that institutions should align academic advising with adult learning characteristics to encourage higher level of developmental self-directed learning. To personalize advising to individual students in a scalable manner, academic advisors must gain the skills to offer purposeful dialogue that promote self-identification of educational needs (Lema & Agrusa, 2019). These findings are pertinent to advisors who are working with individuals who are transitioning from a student into a scholar or practitioner.

Cross (2018) conducted a quantitative study to measure online graduate students' perceptions of academic advising through their experiences where the researcher focused on three variables: communication, advisors' knowledge of support services, and the advisors' behaviors. According to Cross (2018), the consensus of an effective academic advisor is the one who is proactive, timely, and knowledgeable. He was able to describe students' preference and desire for certain performance from an advisor but calls for more case studies to refute or support his findings. I used a qualitative phenomenological study to contribute to Cross' study and be particularly useful for universities' TM tactics for academic advisors.

Craft et al. (2016) conducted a content analysis of institutional online documents related to academic advising and their findings offer an establishment of available leaflets to clarify advisors' roles and expectations on advising graduate students. Most of Craft et al. (2016) information centered on transactional and procedural processes when dealing with online students, and there was no consistency from one university to another on defining the role of an academic advisor. My study on the role of hiring, onboarding, and assignments in effective academic advisors is a method for me to portray actual lived experiences from academic advisors to provide evidence for potential consensus on defining the job description for academic advising, which allow universities to update their online documentation and expectation.

Conceptual Framework

Human interaction is the core responsibility for academic advisors, and it is the most reliable approach to building relationships with students to effectively assist them with their academic, personal, and career goals (Joslin, 2018). This unique interaction with students can increase retention and student satisfaction, so Joslin (2018) introduced the SAAM framework. SAAM focuses on enterprise-wide systems and data analytics to address the alignment between organizational culture, leadership, and the advising capacity that includes their practices, behaviors, and equipment.

According to Joslin (2018), SAAM requires a large-scale commitment from the institution that wants to create a student-centric environment, which includes investment to the academic advising department to achieve the concept of SCA. In addition to SAAM, Santos and Goncalves (2018) suggested that perceived organizational support, internal marketing, and organizational culture all correlates to positive employee assets, which supports the need for universities to shift its operation to employee-focused paradigm to improve the academic advising department before it can expect the employees to conceive and promote student-centric learning (SCL), especially through appreciative advising. By truly understanding the above notion, my research can conceptualize the framework for the study in hiring, onboarding, and assignment for academic advising staff.

Student-Centric Learning

Klemencic (2017) discussed the conceptual foundations of SCL through the European higher education policy agenda. Klemencic implies that SCL is widely accepted, which is relevant to the U.S. school system because Western society influences both European and the U.S. higher education framework. Universities will seek to implement SCL to comply with educational standards, so analyzing the context of SCL is critical for each institution. According to Klemencic (2017), SCL should be viewed as a metaconcept because of its complex matter; therefore, it is depicted into three distinct conceptions: “a pedagogic concept to foster individual learning, a cultural frame for developing communities of learning and a lever supporting system” (p. 73).

Based on Klemencic’s (2017) depiction of the three conceptions of SCL:

1. The pedagogic concept means to complement traditional lecture-based approach with methods that nurture problem-solving, critical thinking and reflective thinking skills.
2. The cultural frame for developing communities of learning implies that institutional culture must support an open dialog and reflective feedback between the school (faculties, administration, and student affairs) and its students for autonomy in a learning environment.
3. SCL lives or dies in an institution’s supporting system where the system must bring about more personalized and individualized services to student’s education

that consist of easy enrollment, student development, learning outcomes, and lifelong learning.

Universities that promote SCL must adopt developmental strategies alongside their curriculum for students to engage with their learning environment in an era where individualized services are expected. Academic advisors fall right in the center of action to accomplish the objectives in a SCL environment.

Steele and White (2019) explained how higher education leadership should drop the corporate logic mentality and tap into academic advisors' unique expertise to create a student-centric environment to compete in the business of education. Because fulltime academic advisors speak to students as their daily routine, they can support and implement SCL according to the three conceptions of SCL. Steele and White (2019) spark the need for more research about the role of academic advisor and how effective personnel can provide critical data to decision-makers through informed recruiting and retaining practices for fulltime academic advisors.

Hwang and Choi (2019) conducted research on service quality in higher education using a modified service quality (SERVQUAL) scale and concluded that perceived service quality influences outcomes such as student satisfaction and institutional image, which can affect behavioral intention like recommendation, student retention, and word of mouth advertising. They also indicated that professors and administrative staff are significant factors to enhance the quality of service, which concur with academic advising research (Mann, 2020; White, 2020; Zhang, et al., 2019). The data from Hwang and Choi's SERVQUAL scale provide evidence that individualized advising increase student satisfaction because the students perceived that the school cares about their success, which is why academic advisors are the key component to an institution's longevity.

Mann (2020) explained that the unique position of academic advising can provide advisors the ability to address four of the five factors of measuring SERVQUAL in higher education because of their daily routine to connect with students. According to Hwang and Choi (2019), the five factors are reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and tangibles. The only factor that advising do not have direct impact is the institution's tangible items within the university like physical facilities and digital platform. Advisors do support reliability, responsiveness, empathy, and assurance to students because of their daily interaction; therefore, staffing the right person in the advising role is critical (Mann, 2020). Sheldon et. al. (2015) used the advisor quality survey (AQS) to assess advisor knowledge, availability, and autonomy supportiveness, which concluded that fulltime advisors could offer high quality advising based on SCL. Students receiving high quality advising can generate positive behavioral intention; therefore, the institution can increase its ability to achieve SCA against other educational institutions (Hwang & Choi, 2019).

Sustainable Competitive Advantage

SCA is a strategic goal for organizations to differentiate their product or service attribute within the market by broaden or maximining the gap in capability from their competitors (Coyne, 1986). Thomas and McFarlane (2018) examined the advising role and espoused adequate staffing, coordinating, training, and listening to academic and faculty advisors to fully partner with students in their learning and generate long lasting student success, a key element to SCA for educational institutions. Skilled advisors working for an institution that invest in the academic advising department with strategic tools and knowledge will foster the gap in capability compared to other universities (Thomas & McFarlane, 2018).

Butt et al. (2020) explored the phenomenon of high turnover with employees in higher education in Pakistan. The authors expressed that the country is experiencing rapid growth in private sector universities because education has shifted to a revenue service industry rather than a quality education. The same transition is happening in the U.S. school system, especially with for-profit higher education (Eaton et al., 2020). Butt et al. (2020) focus on the psychological contract between employees (mostly faculty) and the university's administration, emphasizing internal marketing that influences employees' attitudes. Their findings indicated that the driving factors for high turnover are unregulated compliance and lack of qualified staff. These two items directly impact the university's SCA and their quality of education. Since the US for-profit education is growing at a similar pace with similar undesirable outcomes (Eaton et al., 2020), universities need to address these factors. Academic advising is becoming more critical to higher education sector because they are essential for retaining students (Mann, 2020); therefore, high turnover in the academic advising department can negatively affect student retention.

Caldwell and Floyd (2014) denoted that high performance work systems (HPWS) create and maintain SCA because the core practice is to invest and value employees to dramatically reduce turnover and increase organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB). They listed the seven practices in HPWS that help define what an organization need to invest to achieve SCA:

1. Ensuring Employee Security: Gramm and Schnell (2013) researched the effect of long-term-employment (LTE) contracts and found evidence that firms offering LTE contracts improve employee-customer interactions and OCB. Universities can build a trusting partnership with advisors by providing job security through effective policies and commitment as their LTE contract. Advisors are more committed to their students' success when their employer creates a desirable working environment.
2. Selective Hiring: Russell and Brannan (2016) explored the practices of recruitment, selection and integration of employee that shape the branding of an employer. They found that employers must display attributes that match its organization's culture to attract talents who fit within the organization. Institutions that evaluate specific character, knowledge, attitude, critical skills, and attributes of an effective advisor will improve the hiring practices to place the right person to provide high quality advising. Improve employee retention equate to SCA because advisors who believe in their employer's branding offer greater advisor-student interactions based on HPWS model.
3. Decentralized Decision-Making: Wriston (2007) presented an adaptable model for achieving a high-performance culture, which requires decentralized decision-making because of the four critical components to high-performance: (1) a

collaborative environment, (2) a culture of accountability, (3) focus on strategic priorities, and (4) robust processes. Klemencic (2017) stated that students want more personalize and individualize attention as high quality advising, which demand institutions to decentralize decision making or risk losing their competitive edge.

4. High Results-Based Compensation: Caldwell and Floyd (2014) stated that high-performance culture involves compensating employees based upon organization's profit-sharing policy. The department of education has strict policies on how to compensate employees at a college that accept students' financial aid, so university need to assess the market rate for quality advisors and offer a salary that is competitive. Institutions will have to be creative on how to reward high performers without jeopardizing their eligibility as a Title IV institution.
5. Training by Commitment: Caldwell and Floyd (2014) espoused that HPWS requires heavy investment in training that focuses on critical thinking, problem solving, and individuals taking responsibility for results to gain ownership and commitment to meet organizational goals. The advising team will need this type of training commitment from their university to provide the highest quality of advising.
6. Reduced Status Barriers: HPWS breaks down barriers like hierarch, inequality, and favoritism in search for valuing all employees for their ideas and innovation by developing a culture to encourage communication among its members to try and take risks to achieve organizational goals (Nugroho, 2018). Less barriers

within the advising department will unleased the potential of what an advisor can offer to attain SCA.

7. Sharing Key information: Nugroho (2018) stated that collaborative culture in an organization positively affects knowledge sharing where the transfer of knowledge among members are smooth and common. One key element of SCA is the ability to manage knowledge at a faster paste compared to its competitors, especially in the digital era. Advisors are in the frontline with direct contact to students where they can obtain critical information; therefore, with effective knowledge management, the university can rapidly innovate policies and procedures that support SCA.

While conducting a literature review for knowledge management (KM) processes at private universities in Iraq, Mahdi et al., (2018) discovered that successful KM is the most powerful resource for organization to stay competitive because the process of exchanging information effectively is complex, challenging, and hard to emulate. Since, SCA depends on knowledge-based objectives (Nugroho, 2018), decision-makers at a university who support SCA elements must value the unique position within the advising department (Thomas & McFarlane, 2018); therefore, more investment in quality advisors are needed, particularly in recruiting, onboarding, and training.

Employee-Focused Paradigm

Higher education institutions need to invest in quality advisors to achieve SCA, but what does it mean strategically to invest? Parsons (1994) researched total quality management and discovered a dynamic paradigm shift where employee-first approach is much more effective to empower employees instead of delegating authorities to expect high performance. Employee-first or employee-focused paradigm view employees as internal customers that provide the mean for organization to perform at high quality where external customers are satisfied (Parsons, 1994). An organization that views its employees as internal customers will invest its resources to improve employee engagement. According to Antony (2018), employee engagement is the key factor to enhance productivity, OCB, and retention rate, which contribute to an organization's competitive advantage. Thereby, employee-focused paradigm placed more value in employee engagement to achieve SCA and the following theories help explain the concept: SET, Expectancy Theory, and SRT.

Social Exchange Theory

SET derived from the field of social psychology with the early writings of Homans and Blau during the 1960's. Cook and Rice (2006) reviewed Homans' work and summarized the five propositions from his work to explain social behavior in terms of exchange theory, they are:

1. Success propositions: behavior that generates positive consequences is likely to be repeated.
2. Stimulus propositions: behavior that has been rewarded on such occasions in the past will be performed in similar situations.
3. Value propositions: the more valuable the result of an action is to an actor, the more likely that action is to be performed.

4. Deprivation-satiation proposition: the more often a person has recently received a particular reward for an action, the less valuable is an additional unity of that reward.
5. Distributive justice proposition: people will become angry and aggressive when they do not receive what they anticipated or do not view the rate of return is fair. (p. 55)

Based on the listed proposal regarding social exchange theory, human resources and upper management can implement policies using these basic concepts to moderate the relationship between employee engagement and psychological contract. Psychological contract is defined, "as a set of promissory expectations held by the individual employee perceptual in nature" (Antony, 2018 p. 34). Quality advisors who are loyal to their institution would not expect anything less, which is why investing in employee engagement requires basic knowledge of SET.

Expectancy Theory

In the 60's, Victor Vroom introduced the expectancy theory while he was researching workplace motivation. He calculates motivation in human behavior (motivational force) by multiplying three variables: expectancy, instrumentality, and valence. Vroom (1964) explained expectancy (0 or 1) as a person who anticipate a certain effort will lead to a specific performance, instrumentality (0 or 1) as a person's perception that what they produce as performance will lead them to receive a particular reward, and valence (-1, 0, or 1) as the degree to which an individual (perceptually) prefers a given outcome. Llody and Mertens (2018) investigated Vroom's expectancy theory that persisted over 50 years of substantial debate and critics, believe that a fourth variable should be included to the theory. The fourth variable called social context is to address the social factors that can influence valence or the person's positive or negative perception of a given outcome. The new variable was included because individuals are influenced by other individuals who are affected by their social surroundings, like cultural settings, economic status, education, and health i.e., social context of human lives. Llody and Mertens (2018) describe these contexts as the internal relationships (i), number of internal relationships (x), and impact of external environment (e) to calculate the overall social impact (s).

Expectancy theory is widely accepted by practitioners in workplace motivation (Antony, 2018; Lee, 2019; Lloyd & Mertens, 2018) and the fourth variable modifies the theory to include real-world changes to further explain the complexity of motivating workers. Employers can improve employee engagement by applying the formula from expectancy theory, which require decision-makers or upper managers to involve employees in the strategic planning process and be transparent with expectation (Parsons, 1994). Employees' involvement support employee-focused paradigm because it allows managers to communicate and better understand their workers' motivation (Lloyd & Mertens, 2018). Lee (2019) added workers' self-efficacy will positively affect performance management to motivate employees, but it requires proper coaching from managers to increase self-efficacy that is specific to their job context; hence, focus on employees' strengths and weaknesses to properly apply motivational tools that comply with expectancy theory.

Socialization Resource Theory

Organizations use socialization tactics to introduce new employees to their new working environment where they must learn new behaviors and ways of thinking (Saks & Gruman, 2017). Saks and Gruman (2012) introduced SRT as a theoretical approach to organizational socialization and help describe several dimensions of socialization practices to implement on newcomers at specific time periods of their employment. The theory behind socialization is to address the ambiguity and uncertainty to those who are entering a new organization while motivating and supporting the same individuals to become highly productive as retained talents and gain SCA (Batistic, 2017). Saks and Gruman (2017) further research SRT and provided evidence that effective organizational socialization implementation positively affects new hires' work engagement, which support the context of employee-focus paradigm.

According to Cranmer et al., (2016), investing in SRT is to focus on employee-first model and provide social support, assimilation procedures, and job satisfaction variables. Cranmer et al. (2016) explained that social support is to reduce social problems like individual wellbeing, acceptance, and trust; assimilation procedures are intended policies to ease employees' transition to their new work environment by forming effective work relationship and solidify their productive roles; and job satisfaction is the fundamental goal of any organization because those who are satisfied with their job will typically stay in their position. Batistic (2017) noted that not all employees are the same and there is no one-size-fit-all approach; therefore, Batistic introduced the four types of

HR systems in the HR architecture model to address the different types of employees for socialization resources:

1. Commitment-oriented HR systems: for individuals who hold vital knowledge and whose skills are critical to a firm's core or distinctive capabilities.
2. Productivity-based HR systems: individuals' skills are valuable but not unique to one organization and it is easily transferable.
3. Compliance-based HR systems: individuals' skills are generic and low value where the purpose is more transactional rather than relational employment relationships; and
4. Collaborative HR systems: employees with idiosyncratic knowledge who possess unique know-how, but this is of limited strategic value for the organization. (p. 222).

Scholarly histories of academic advising suggest that higher education institutions should use the commitment-oriented HR systems for the advising department because of their unique position to connect with students, which placed them in a critical role to support their institution's longevity (Hwang & Choi, 2019; Mann, 2020; White, 2020; Zhang et al., 2019). Since the suggestion is to put more socialization resources to academic advising based on Cranmer et al. (2016) understanding of SRT, it is essential to research the role of hiring, onboarding, and assigning effective academic advisors. The study into the advising role will play a key component to create an organization culture that support the concept of employee-focus paradigm by complying to social exchange theory, expectancy theory, and socialization resource theory. A university that goes all in on employee-focus strategies can reap the benefit of increased student satisfaction because their faculties and academic advisors can implement the theory of appreciative advising, which requires training in processes, deliveries, and a mindset of student-centered (Miller et al., 2019).

Appreciative Advising

A higher education institution that invests and promotes employee-focus policies in the academic advising department expects their advisors to achieve SCL with their students. A fully student-centered approach requires appreciative advising strategies (Bloom et al., 2008; Miller et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2019). Bloom et al., (2008) defined "appreciative advising as a social-constructivist advising philosophy that provides an advising framework for advisors to use in optimizing their interactions with students in both individual and group settings" (p. 19). Miller et al. (2019) mentioned that the top skills for effective advising are attentive listening, communication, ethics, multicultural competence, and empathic responses, which are empowerment activities that comes from a wide array of theoretical constructs like positive psychology, choice theory, and social constructivist theory. Institutional leaderships invest in employee-focus strategies because they need their advisors to have an appreciative advising mindset to be highly effective in their role (McFarlane & Thomas, 2018). The mindset means that each academic advisor genuinely cares about their students by building rapport, deciphering their hopes and dreams, and create attainable plans to accomplish their educational and career goals (Bloom et al., 2008).

Miller et al. (2019) presented the appreciative advising framework that consist of positive psychology, appreciative inquiry, choice theory, reality therapy, social constructivist theory, and developmental methods. The authors analyzed recent studies about facilitating intervention strategies using appreciative advising to improve retention for residential students who are on probation and modifying it to address online students who are failing their programs. The research provided essential outcomes on ways to improve academic performance for both online and traditional students while exposing the four main areas that advising needs to improve; personal responsibility, affirmations, goal setting and life planning, and self-management (Miller et al., 2019). By exposing the lived experiences of advisors, the current study can emphasize the four areas and learn how an organization can recruit and retain advisors to provide higher level of developmental learning. These data are essential to implement strategic TM objectives within the academic advising department.

Zhang et al. (2019) depict a holistic view of student success through appreciative advising and the Deming Cycle. Deming Cycle is a sequence for planning, testing, doing, studying, and acting to improve the service quality of student advising, while appreciative advising is to optimize students' educational experiences (Zhang et al., 2019). The authors collected narrative data from the university, college, department, and faculties to portray a well-rounded outlook of student advising. The article concurs with other scholars that students benefited from appreciative advising (Lema & Agrusa, 2019; Mann, 2020; Miller et al., 2019), but future research should include personal experiences by focusing on advising routine, best practices, and areas to improve (Zhang et al., 2019).

The current study on the role of hiring, onboarding, and assignments in effective academic advisor will add new content to the scholar of academic advising and provide suggestion to improve the selection process for high performance advisors; therefore, higher education institutions can gain efficiency to their TM strategies within the advising department.

Talent Management

Organizations that want to attain SCA within their market need to focus on growth by aligning business strategies with its ability to attract and retain the best talent, which calls for TM (Badshah & Bulut, 2020; Maurya & Agarwal, 2018). The fundamental process in TM involves recruiting, hiring, onboarding, training, performance management, and succession management of employees (Tetik, 2016). Collings and Mellahi (2009) defined TM as “activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of key positions which differentially contribute to the organization’s sustainable competitive advantage, the development of a talent pool of high potential and high performing incumbents to fill these roles, and the development of a differentiated human resource architecture to facilitate filling these positions with competent incumbents and to ensure their continued commitment to the organization.” (p. 304).

The definition of TM is long because of its complexity with internal and external workforce, forecasting, and human behavior (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). Cappelli and Keller (2014) provided an overview of the literature on TM. They discussed the history of TM, the current strategies for managing talents, and what future studies should focus on with regards to conceptual approaches and practical challenges for TM. Their theoretical development suggests organizations will always face scarce resources, so investing in the individuals or jobs with the greatest return is associated with TM. The traditional ways of internal and external TM are not effective and costly because of the uncertainty in supply of talents that are becoming more mobile (Cappelli & Keller, 2014). Organizations must recognize the problems created by uncertainty and create new approaches to TM using both internal and external strategies that can minimize the cost of managing talents. Cappelli and Keller indicated that the job (not the individuals) is the most appropriate locus of differentiation, which supports the idea that academic advising is the job that encompass exemplary individual performance to contribute to a university's competitive advantage.

Tetik (2016) stated that identification of key positions in TM is critical to achieving organizational objectives that support the company's SCA. The current research in recruiting and onboarding academic advisors will add empirical knowledge to the advising position and provide critical data for decision-makers to strategize a plan for effective TM. Heinen and O'Neill (2004) believe that SCA can be obtained through TM practices; therefore, they provided some key factors in successful talent planning and development to achieve characteristics such as value, rareness, and inimitability within the organization. There are ten key factors according to Heinen and O'Neill (2004):

1. Chief Executive Ownership: Effective TM always start from the top. The organization's chief executive officer (CEO) must provide a shared set of values that supports and reward talents through explicit guiding principles that matches the organization's business strategies.

2. A business activity, not an administrative HR task: TM must be included in the business model within the organization where it is part of the strategic-planning processes. Business goals can only be achieved by people; therefore, finding and retaining the right staff fuel the competitive edge for an organization.
3. Development must be forward-looking: TM must predict future business needs both short- and long-term goals by communicating with leaderships. Those who are successful at predicting can develop activities to prepare employees with specific skills and abilities to meet the demand of future businesses.
4. Focus on rigorous candidate assessment: Investing on assessment tools to manage the data of candidates' competencies, performance, and capabilities are a key component for all developmental strategies. Talent managers will need continuous information about the current talent inventory to make effective decisions that can achieve the overall business goals.
5. Balance organizational and individual needs: Talent planning must be transparent on what they can and cannot do to fulfill individual needs while assessing the cost of labor to meet the need of the organization. The best approach is to establish a developmental agreement for individuals to specify goals, expected contributions, and the process of knowledge transfer, so the procedure is measurable and can analyze potential cost when managing talent.
6. Invest in staff and process support: Every talent has a purpose within an organization; therefore, it is necessary to have a staff with the sole purpose in developing processes to assess the company's talent pool, learn and share

knowledge with various managers about company's needs, address the essences from individuals, and mentor or coach people who are in a leadership role.

7. Develop multiple talent pools and career paths: The uncertainty of alignment in needs between employees and the organization makes it impossible to predict specific successors. An organization cannot risk its scarce resources to develop a specific individual to fulfill a critical opening just to have this person leave for opportunities elsewhere. The solution is to develop a talent pool for adequate supply and using the resources to motivate high-potential talents by attending to their growth to increase their opportunities within the organization.
8. Focus on on-the-job learning: According to the authors, most development occurs on the job, so it is essential to identify and utilize some key positions that offer rich learning opportunities. Every employee who has potential within the organization should be placed in these positions to accelerate their development where their performances are evaluated and compared to the incumbent's productivity.
9. Conduct regular talent reviews: Reviews are essential to understand individuals' strengths and weaknesses while identifying the organizational capability issues. Without these regular reviews, it would increase the risk of being unprepared to meet the demand of business needs and weaken the organization's SCA.
10. Leverage technology and measure: Effective knowledge management is indispensable to compete against competitors and it is impossible to accomplish without technology in today's modern world. Companies that have SCA will

always invest in technologies that offer easy and quick access to critical data at any time to manage talent to maximize performance. The data, if used correctly, will measure implementation and the impact from current strategic plans and allow time for adjustment to address mistakes.

The listed elements for successful talent planning and development will be used as a benchmark for our research to assess the current TM strategies within the universities being studied, especially with their recruiting, hiring, onboarding, and assignment procedures for academic advisors. Since talent has a lifecycle with different stages, concurring with Tetik (2016), the focus will target the first part of the lifecycle; attracting, recruiting, onboarding, and retaining talent. The rest of the talent lifecycle stages are developing, managing, and recovering talent, which are essential to TM, but the range of substance is beyond the scope of this current study (Tetik, 2016).

Recruiting and Onboarding

Recruiting and onboarding new talents have been studied for many years, since it is a necessity for organizations to attract qualified candidates and hiring essential talents to replace outgoing employees or fulfilling positions to sustain growth (Badshah & Bulut, 2020). Sharma and Stol (2019) who discussed about organizational fit defined onboarding as, “a formal or informal process of integrating newly hired employees and transforming them from being outsiders to productive members of the organization” (p. 1). Their investigation focused specifically on software developers because the profession lacks literatures that can evaluate the theoretical or conceptual models with onboarding, which the same situation was discovered with the academic advising role. While conducting their research on software developer's onboarding strategies, Sharma and Stol (2019) coined the term, "organizational fit," which means to quantify the relationship between onboarding success and turnover intention using two variables: job satisfaction and workplace relationship. Their findings suggested that investing on effective onboarding processes positively influences job satisfaction and workplace relationship in long-term while reducing employee's intention to leave the organization.

Karambelkar and Bhattacharya (2017) noticed that onboarding is often overlooked and neglected by employers because they view it as the training of formalities, which is a similar case with academic advising. The authors believe treating onboarding as change management will reap greater outcomes from TM strategies, especially retaining productive employees. Their solution is to implement a change management model ADKAR (awareness, desire, knowledge, ability, and reinforcement) into the onboarding process because ADKAR is a popular model for organizational change at all levels. Jeff Hiatt published the AKDAR model in 2006 where he focuses on people change adaptation through a sequence of five goals for change management in business, government, and the community (Galli, 2018). To implement ADKAR successfully into the onboarding process, the organization needs to have a clear understanding of the required knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors to function effectively (Karambelkar & Bhattacharya, 2017). Unfortunately, there is a lack of consensus with academic advising's responsibilities (Larson et al., 2018; McGill, 2019; Zarges, et al., 2018), which makes it challenging to apply ADKAR in an educational institution's onboarding procedures.

Successful onboarding goal is to generate an organizational fit within their workforce to accomplish the highest employee satisfaction with the lowest turnover that benefits the institution's vision and mission (Sharma & Stol, 2019). Organizational fit is about developing a significant employer-employee relationship, but it must start with internal marketing (Butt et al., 2020). Internal marketing is a concept where satisfied employees are the ones who provide high quality services to customers (students), so institutions should view their employees as a first market (Santos & Goncalves, 2018). Satisfied employees have a sense of comfort and happiness with their job and developed a workplace relationship with colleagues and management (Sharma & Stol, 2019). Huang (2020) who analyzed the literatures about internal marketing between 1990 to 2016, provided evidence that organizations must incorporate employee-view processes to truly understand their needs, interests, and capabilities to develop organizational strategies to improve service qualities. The process of interviewing experienced academic advisors for the current study must be employee-focused (Huang, 2020) to properly obtain their perspectives regarding recruiting, onboarding, and assigning personnel to this critical role. The input from these unique individuals will provide significant data to support an effective internal marketing strategy because it allows the organization to actively analyze and reshape existing knowledge to create and innovate new ideas (Ballantyne, 2003).

Successful internal marketing can generate a reputation as the place to work because it positively influences the employer branding by focusing on human capital, strategic capabilities, and culture (Vercic et al., 2018); therefore, the organization attracts qualified talents and increase the pool of potential candidates during the recruiting procedure. The hiring process is the next step once a candidate is selected and Bauer (2010) explained that onboarding has the power to harness new employees' knowledge, skills, and abilities faster by implementing the four Cs of onboarding: compliance, clarification, culture, and connection. According to Bauer (2010):

1. Compliance is having the basic tangible items ready such as hardware, software, password, workstation, tax forms etc. before the new hire starts their first day of work. If any one of these items are not ready, it will increase the cost of recruiting because it slows down the hiring process.
2. Clarification is about learning and understanding the expectation as a new person on the job. The sooner they know what to do, the sooner they become productive.
3. Culture refers to organizational culture and new employees must have an easy path to interpret the overall culture to have a chance for long-term success.
4. Connection is the last C; yet, it has the most potential to create positive outcomes from new hires. Connection is the means to establish interpersonal relationship, support mechanisms, and information sharing within a new organization.

The four aspects of onboarding are the key elements to implement a successful onboarding strategy because they reinforce the employer/employee's psychological contracts (Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2019). Caldwell and Petters (2017) described psychological contract as a profound expectation between two parties that reflects their reciprocal obligation. The employer expects their talents to be highly productive and benefit the organization while the employees expect a wage, commitment, and opportunities from their employer. Organizations that value their employees typically place high trust in their workers; therefore, strengthen the psychological contract and creates an organizational culture where employees display organizational citizenship behavior (Caldwell & Petters, 2017). This type of partnership allows people to be more productive and innovative to achieve SCA.

Summary and Transition

The above mentioned that researching talent acquisition and onboarding for academic advisors is vital to the longevity of a university because of their critical role to engage students. The interaction between the advisor and the student has a direct correlation with student retention and satisfaction (Craft et al., 2016; Cross, 2018, Leman & Agrusa, 2019), which are key notification of SCA in the field of education. It is argued that current hiring, onboarding, and assigning personnel to the advising role is inadequate and obtaining information from experienced advisors can expose the inadequacy.

Chapter 3 presents the research design and methodology for this research. It will cover the appropriateness for selecting a phenomenological approach for this qualitative study and provide an outline to support the rationale. The framework will include the researcher's role, research questions and sub-questions, and the process of collecting data. Lastly, this section will address the safety of the participants while capturing the trustworthiness and ethical procedures. The current method is to create a safe comfortable environment to allow participants autonomy to answer true in-depth narrative of their lived experiences about their employer's recruitment, onboarding, and assignment to the academic advising role.

Chapter 4 shares the process of recruiting advisors to participate in the study and provided their demographics. It also explains the systematic approach to coding that justify emerging themes which are grounded to the literature review. The findings were shared throughout the chapter with direct quotes from the participants and trying to depict their stories as they were told. Lastly, it exposed some unexpected outcomes and how it impacted the study.

Chapter 5 has the researcher's analysis of the outcomes and provided a discussion to tie the results to the research questions and literature review. It offers the researcher's interpretation of the findings based on the two research questions. There were some limitation and delimitation to the study, which are mentioned in this chapter, but the results contributed to the field of knowledge about academic advising. Finally, this chapter dispensed a few recommendations for future research in the advising role and further the study with the goal of achieving SCA for higher educational institutions.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The study was designed to capture and decipher the lived experiences from academic advisors regarding their online university's hiring, onboarding, and assigning talents to the academic advising team. As a member of NACADA, I used its official site, its features, and social medias to recruit the required participants using purposive sampling from those who are in the academic advising role. I recruited seven participants through NACADA connections which allowed me to utilize the snowball sampling strategy to obtain six more qualified volunteers to have a total of 13 advisors. I used semistructured interviews with open-ended questions to allow the participants to freely express their feelings and beliefs about the current TM system within their institution. The sample size was enough for me to explore a broad range of lived experiences within the academic department for depth and breadth by analyzing the experienced academic advisors' responses from the interviews. The collective data made it possible for me to gain a holistic and comprehensive view of the common TM approaches, the advisors' feelings associated with effectiveness, and their perception of the institution's SCA. The outcome from this study provides critical insight to improve the academic advising department that support a strategy to increase or maintain an institution's SCA.

Research Design and Rationale

The study entailed using a qualitative approach to capture the naturalistic meanings from a social phenomenon through the perspectives of individuals who were part of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This type of method will not allow me to generalize the field of academic advising, but rather an in-depth understanding of a particular process with social interactions (Dworkin, 2012). According to Creswell and Poth (2016), the five main approaches to qualitative research are narrative research, phenomenology, ethnographies, grounded theory, and case study. In the case of academic advising, Guest et al. (2006) suggested a phenomenological approach as the most appropriate because they agreed that the method is to gather information from a homogeneous group who were part of the same phenomenon to make sense of a shared perception and behavior. They continued stating that 12 participants are likely sufficient to achieve acceptable data saturation to carry out an in-depth examination of concepts and characteristics relevant to the purpose of the study. I ended up with 13 participants who provided enough information to meet data saturation for my research.

Phenomenology is a philosophy of experience in which researchers systematically document participants' lived experiences to examine a particular phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Edmund Husserl defined phenomenology as the science of the essence of consciousness (Smith, 2018). Giorgi (2009) wrote about descriptive phenomenological approaches and posited that everything to be studied in a phenomenological process must come from the viewpoint of consciousness or subjectivity and no aesthetic or theoretical additions are permitted while transcribing the information that was presented. Giorgi continued, explaining the process as way to transform descriptive data from participants' perspectives into interpretive data where others can understand and visualize a particular phenomenon.

I implemented a phenomenological approach to view the perceptions, beliefs, and feelings associated with the university's recruitment, onboarding, placement, and training to maintain an effective academic advising team that can support the organization's SCA. To obtain a thorough understanding of this phenomenon, I used purposive sampling strategy to search for participants from NACADA and its social medias that host academic advising communities. Those who are selected went through the screening process (see Appendix A) to meet the following criteria: advise online students at an institution that offer bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees; and been in the advising role for a minimum of 3 years. I posted messages through NACADA site and its social media to ask for volunteers; see Appendix C for a sample of the post. Once a participant responded, I sent the consent form to the volunteer and asked them to recollect the time when they went through the hiring process for their current institution. When the participant agreed to the term and email back the consent form, I scheduled a date to conduct a semistructured interview through Zoom meeting. Moustakas (1994) found that open-ended questions in a semistructured interview is the best process for participants to provide depth and breadth responses that is based on their perceptions.

I recorded the Zoom meetings and was able use the transcribing feature to capture the interviews, which was the raw data subsequently analyzed. The process of open and axial coding the raw data captured concepts, themes, and patterns that relate to the university's talent management (Williams et al., 2019). Williams et al. (2019) explained open coding as the first level of coding to identify distinct concepts and themes for categorization while axial coding as second level of coding to further refine, algin, and categorize identifiable themes and concepts. These data can be analyzed to empirically interpret patterns associated with effective recruiting, onboarding, and assigning key personnel to the academic advising team.

Research Questions and Subquestions

The following are RQs to be addressed in this study. The Subquestions (SQs) listed for each respective RQ was the basis for the interview questions.

RQ1: What lived experiences do academic advisors encounter during initial talent acquisition, to include recruitment, hiring, onboarding, initial training, and early staffing?

SQ1: Describe your experience during the time when the institution recruited and hired you to be an academic advisor.

SQ2: During your process of joining the advising team, tell me what went well and what needs improvement?

SQ3:Prior to being an advisor, describe your career/job and how it led you become an academic advisor?

SQ4: How would you describe the current recruiting and onboarding strategies for the advising department?

SQ5: What knowledge, skills, and ability (KSA) or characteristics should advisor possess to be a good addition to your team?

RQ2: How do academic advisors perceive the impact of initial talent acquisition on their job performance?

SQ6: How does the effectiveness of talent acquisition affect your job performance?

SQ7: How does the effectiveness of talent acquisition affect the university's performance?

Role of the Researcher

According to Moustakas (1994), the qualitative researcher has several responsibilities, particularly in phenomenological study. First, they must provide the nature and findings of prior research about the phenomenon for readers to understand the topic and its implication. Second, they must gain access to relevant participants in an ethical manner where volunteers are protected mental, physically, and financially. The goal is to develop an ethical and trustworthy relationship between participants and researcher. Third, they must approach the research with tremendous curiosity where no detail is too small while scrutinizing and accounting for their own biases when they try to interpretate the raw data. Lastly, they must distinguish their findings from prior research by going back to the literature reviews and outline the investigation in terms of social meaning and the implication to personal and professional values.

Another role of a qualitative researcher is to create an environment where participants can provide their recollection of a particular phenomenon through their perspectives without the fear of retribution (Moustakas, 1994). Providing a comfortable environment allows participants to speak freely and provide their best true statement according to their perspectives, an approach that offers both openness and rigor (Giorgi, 2009). A collection of rich data from participants who are honest, followed by a hermeneutic analysis can generate themes, concepts, and patterns to make meanings out of the combined experiences to further understand a particular phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). Additionally, a qualitative researcher must reflect on their own life experiences and beliefs to counteract unduly influences on the participants since they do have control over the process of the study; plus, being aware of their own perspectives can reduce personal bias during the interpretation (Moustakas, 1994).

My personal career experience could lead to bias and influence the current study. As a researcher, I acknowledge that working as an academic advisor for over 5 years can produce preconceived outcomes. However, being aware of the potential impact of personal bias facilitated reflection and reduced the likelihood of asserting my personal perspectives. Fortunately, the NACADA advising community has a large population of academic advisors, so obtaining the required number of participants who I had limited connection with was not a problem. Also, my experience in academic advising made me a knowledgeable interviewer capable of communicating as a colleague versus as an outsider trying to understand their role. By addressing potential bias, I created detail description of the interview process that allow participants to express their experiences through open-ended, semistructured questions (Moustakas, 1994).

Methodology

Participants

I used NACADA, a global community for academic advising to stay connected with those who are active advisors. I posted an ad (see Appendix B) within NACADA website to request for volunteers from those who can contribute to this study. NACADA also uses social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter; therefore, I was able to expand the search for potential participants. Those who responded to my ad went through a series of screening questions (see Appendix C) through emails before being selected for the study. I asked for referrals from those who do not qualify with the goal of expanding my selection. Those who qualified and agreed to the interviews, I contacted them through Zoom and introduce myself to build some rapport by answering their questions or addressing some concerns before pressing the recording button. Besides being the researcher, I disclosed that I am also an academic advisor working at Walden University where I am also pursuing my doctoral degree. Being transparent about my career helped maintain a certain degree of rapport to conduct a quality interview (Giorgi, 2009), since being in the field gave them a sense of understanding. The goal is to have more than 12 participants in preparation where 12 interviews do not meet data saturation. I ended up with 13 interviews that met the criteria.

Sample Section

A phenomenological approach is where participants can provide a rich, detailed, first-person account of their experiences, so it is critical to systematically organize the selection process that targets a particular phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). To select the right participants, only active academic advisors were considered for this study. This includes those who advise for bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. The participant selections were members of NACADA and its social medias or referrals from these members, but the outcomes only pertain to those who advise online students. The followings are a list of guided recruitment and data collection for elucidation:

1. Join as a member of NACADA and network with other members.
2. Post an invitation to the study in NACADA posting area, which includes their social media sites.

3. Send emails to potential participants to explain the purpose of the study and describe the procedures before agreeing to move forward.
4. If more than 12 volunteers to the study, I placed the others in reserve just in case data saturation is not met.
5. I contacted those who were selected by email and send them the consent form before scheduling a zoom meeting for the interview. They were instructed to think about their university's recruiting and hiring practices before the meeting to allow them to recollect their own experiences when they joined the advising team.
6. A consent form that includes a detailed description of the study and the understanding of participant rights were provided to all who volunteered.
7. Zoom meetings have the capability to record the meeting and transcribe the dialog. The virtual meeting set up a semistructured interview process with open-ended questions. All participants were informed of the recording, and they responded to the consent form by email before proceeding.
8. All digitally obtain data are stored in a secure location on an encrypted external hard drive. All personal identifiable information will be destroyed once the dissertation is completed and approved.

Instrumentation

For this research, I used open-ended, semistructured interview questions (see Appendix A). There are various ways to conduct semistructured interviews; like, face-to-face, via telephone, or some sort of internet packages (Brown & Danaher, 2019). I selected an internet VoIP technology with Zoom as the preferred provider. Zoom meetings allow me to observe non-verbal cues without traveling or the hassle of finding a location to meet. The set up for a semistructured interview is to have a set of questions that target a particular phenomenon while ensuring the interviewees to elicit open responses. The questions targeted TM approaches for academic advisors from the advisor's perspectives. Brown and Danaher (2019) suggested to use the connectivity, humanness, and empathy (CHE) principles during the interviews to address the ethical and methodological concerns. They explained connectivity as establishing rapport and credibility as a researcher. I used humanness to respect participants as a person and to always put their well-being as a priority. Lastly, I need empathy to integrate personal responses with my research questions. Semistructured interviews is a process to have authentic interactions between parties for meaningful data in an ethical manner for a qualitative study.

Data Collection

For this research, I used a purposive sampling strategy to post invitations through NACADA posting area and its social medias to obtain 13 volunteers who are active academic advisors for an online university to partake in this study. Again, according to Guest et al., (2006), 12 participants will render acceptable data saturation to carry out an in-depth examination of concepts and characteristics relevant to the purpose of the study. Those who responded to the email request for volunteer received an email with individual link to a scheduled 20 – 30 minutes Zoom meeting with detail instructions and the consent form. The first part of every meeting was not recorded because I needed to build rapport and address the participants questions and concerns. Basic information like years of service, which program they support, and their highest level of education and major were collected during this time. After the ok from the interviewee, I pressed record and administered the research questions during the interviews and record their answers. All participants were notified of the recording and the purpose of the transcripts with their rights to stop at any time.

The purpose of asking the participants to think about the university's recruiting practices is to allow the participants ample time to reflect upon their feelings and experiences with regards to their university's talent management strategies and certain area of opportunities to effectively staff team members. I used Zoom as the preferred choice of videoconference because studies have shown that Zoom is better suited for data collection compared to alternative VoIP technologies including Skype and FaceTime (Archibald et al., 2019). Archibald et al., (2019) espoused that Zoom's key advantage is its ability to securely record and store sessions without using third-party software, which increase the protection of sensitive data especially using real-time encryption. Videoconference was the best approach compared to face-to-face or telephone because most of the participants work from home or in different cities and States, so it is not feasible to conduct face-to-face interviews. Telephone conversation lacks the visual connection for non-verbal communication. Zoom is a cost-effective and convenient alternative to traditional approach to generate data in a qualitative study, and it became widely accepted after the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic that pressured the world to practice social distancing to combat the virus.

Data are generated through interviews utilizing Zoom capability to record both audio and video. I reviewed and transcribed the naïve data with accuracy and notate any non-verbal cues through the recording. I utilized Microsoft Word feature to format the transcripts, which allow me to analyze the data for coding. Williams et al. (2019) suggested using open coding for first level to identify concepts and themes for categorization and then, apply axial coding for second level of coding to further refine the identifiable themes and concepts. Once a manual data reduction is completed, I went back to each transcript to re-evaluate the naïve data with the guidance of a coding manual to further the validity and reliability of the data.

Data Analysis

Initial analysis of the data involved using a word cloud, which is a quick tool to illustrate data. A word cloud was generated by TagCrowd displaying word frequencies from participants' answers to the interview questions. The software removed all the stop words, numbers, special characters and excluded unwanted words, so it can depict a meaningful visual. It was placed to display the top 50 frequently used words with a minimum frequency of eight. It also shows the number of frequencies within the text. These words were collected from the dataset to portray the recurring and consistent sentiment expressed by participants.

My formal data analysis started manually by transcribing the recorded interviews into a Microsoft Word document. I used the transcribed data to read, code, and organize themes and patterns to formulate meaningful data (Cypress, 2018). I needed this method to be clear, and repeatable where it leads to data analysis that determine if the advisors' experiences created a theoretical frame or conceptual understanding associated with the phenomenon (Williams et al., 20219). Giorgi (2009) provided five steps in data analysis that meets the rigor in a descriptive phenomenology study. It starts with self-reflection on my preconceptions, assumptions, and personal belief about the phenomenon to eliminate or reduce bias outcomes. The second step is for me to read the whole transcript to get a sense of the entire description with a scientific outlook using phenomenological reduction. The next step is where I break down the description into unit of meanings, which helps me partialize concepts, themes, or patterns for deeper understanding of the experience. The parts or meaning units are determined from a phenomenological psychological perspective to tie the outcomes to the focused phenomenon. Step four is the heart of a phenomenological study because my task is to transform meaningful data into phenomenologically psychologically sensitive expressions. Basically, it is the tedious work that reflect a careful description of the experienced phenomenon as they are presented; therefore, my findings can be checked by others to demonstrate strong knowledge about the result. My final step is to review the discovery and synthesize the meaning from each participant that reflect on the original research questions. By following these steps, I am confident that the output will have reliable codes that represent the themes, pattens, and concepts that accurately describe the naïve data, which includes the participants' feelings, beliefs, preferences, and perspectives about the phenomenon in question.

The data analysis process is an inductive approach that ensure closeness to the data. The naïve data is coded according to the participants' response in a precise and narrow manner to capture the complexity and diversity of the data. The initial codes went through a second cycle of coding in which higher-level categories are assess by drawing on existing theory and concepts that are related to hiring, onboarding, and assignment to the academic advisor's role. During the higher-level categories, a coding framework emerged, and I used it to create a coding manual that depict the data into meaningful outcomes that can answer the research questions. The coding manual helps me anchor the study in literature and provides further support for my findings, but it will be further discussed in Chapter 4. By using inductive approach first, the initial coding allows me to stay loyal to the data before creating a manual to ensure structure and theoretical relevance in a deductive approach, so the process was cycled back and forth between data and theory (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019).

After 13 interviews were conducted, the data analysis begins with me acknowledging my own biases and preconceptions, which is the first of five steps from Giorgi (2009) qualitative data analysis process. I had to set aside my personal experiences as an academic advisor and reminded myself to be open-minded as I read through the transcripts. While reading the transcripts, a spreadsheet was created to categorize each sentence or sentences that represent an item or a single meaning. Once a spreadsheet was created for each transcript, step two of data analysis starts by analyzing the naïve description one cell at a time and extract the codes or the unit of meanings. In step three I focused on axial coding to explore meaningful data by placing codes into logical, ordered, and simplified form that partialize concepts, themes, or patterns for deeper understanding of their experiences. Using a phenomenological psychological perspective, the unit of meanings are tied to the focused phenomenon. During step four, I utilized inductive coding from step three results and reduce data for themes, concepts, and patterns that nested to each of the research question to develop a coding manual. My final step is to re-review each transcript deductively using the coding manual to discover and synthesize the meaning from each participant that reflect on the original research questions. There were no variations encountered with the steps that were outlined above.

The initial process entailed open coding where my goal is to identify concept indicators in an organized and systematic way (Williams et al., 2019). Open coding is an inductive approach where codes are created by analyzing the transcripts from the interviews. My objective is to extract raw data from the participants' voices as they were presented in text without preconceive expectation. The next process required categorization where the naive data were separated into major and minor concepts while eliminating or combining duplicates or similar meanings. The categorization was necessary before I can apply axial coding, since axial coding involves relating data together to construct linkages between data for themes, categories, and subcategories. Once I discovered these concepts, a coding manual was created that was nested to the research questions and the conceptual framework. The final step was to use the coding manual and conduct a deductive coding approach by re-evaluating the transcripts with the open code spreadsheet. At the end of my analysis, the themes and categories have cohesive and meaning-fill expressions that addressed the research questions.

Trustworthiness

To address the trustworthiness of the current study, I considered the four criteria to meet the rigor of a qualitative trustworthiness (Connelly, 2016). Connelly (2016) conducted research about trustworthiness in qualitative research and they listed the four criteria as credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Below is Connelly's outline of the criteria:

1. Credibility is about using standard procedures that are widely accepted and any variation shall have adequate justification for the approach.
2. Dependability is the stability of the data over time, meaning a study of a phenomenon experienced by a participant may produce similar data from time to time.
3. Confirmability is the consistency of the process to discovery that could be repeated while keeping methodological memos of logs and an audit trail of analysis.
4. Transferability means differently compared to quantitative. Transferability in quantitative usually refers to generalization, but in qualitative, it refers to the study's transferability with the rich, detailed description of the context, location, and the people studied. The key to qualitative transferability is to be transparent about the process of analysis supported by current literature.

To increase the trustworthiness of this study, I used the three level of coding that are suggested by Williams et al. (2019) where they discuss about the art of coding. Williams et al. (2019) indicated the first level of coding is open coding, follow by axial coding before applying the selective coding; yet this strategy can enable a cyclical and evolving data loop by constantly comparing data, apply and reapply data reduction, and consolidate techniques. In open coding, my goal is to identify similar words and phrases, reoccurring textual materials, and concept indicators in an organized and systematic way. These basic coding are essential for axial coding because the second level of coding is to further refines, aligns, and categorizes the themes. I can shift through the collected data into distinct thematic categories to prepare for selective coding. The next level is the selective coding where the purpose is to select and integrate categories of organized data for a cohesive and meaning-filled expressions. A qualitative researcher maintains reliability of data by following a strict coding definition in a systemic process that is transparent where oversight committee can critique the outcomes.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical concerns are a priority within this research, and I took all necessary precaution to protect organizations and participants who were part of the study. This research followed a strict ethical manner that is consistent with the American Psychological Association, Walden University's Institutional Review Board, and the participants' rights. Appendix B further explained the risk and benefits of being in the study, privacy protection, and the participants rights to help volunteers identifying potential barriers before deciding to partake in this study. The email letter also provided contact information to the research participant advocate to report any unethical procedures before, during, or after the research.

Summary and Transition

Chapter 3 explained why a phenomenological approach was the best choice to study academic advisors' perceptions and feelings regarding the recruiting, onboarding, and assignments to the advising department. An outline of the research design detail the rationale of the methodology and added the role of the researcher, participant selection process, and data collection. The chapter also discussed the instrument where semistructured interviews can produce meaningful data to support the study, which includes sample size, the preferred choice of videoconference, and the process of data analyses. Lastly, this chapter addressed the concerns with trustworthiness, ethical manners, and the privacy and safety of the participants and their organizations that are consistent with both the American Psychological Association and Walden University's Institutional Review Board.

Chapter 4 describes the results of this study regarding the lived experience of seasoned academic advisors with their institution's recruiting, hiring, and onboarding talents for the advising department. It begins with the restatement of the research questions before diving into the participant selection process, limitation of the participant pool, and data gathering. Next, it details the data analysis method and using participants statements to show the emerging themes that address the research questions. It also provided some unexpected outcomes according to participants' answers to the interview questions. Lastly, in Chapter 5, the interpretation to the findings is discoursed followed by a discussion about the overall study. The last chapter also evaluates the limitations and delimitations to the research along with some recommendation for future research. It concludes the study right after a brief consideration on the implication to social change

Chapter 4: Results

In this chapter, I present the results of my study regarding the lived experiences of academic advisors' initial stages of the talent management (TM) processes in terms of recruiting, hiring, onboarding, and staffing. First, I reiterated the research questions followed by the description of the participant selection process and their demographics. Next, I provided the data analysis and coding procedures to explain how identified themes emerged, followed by theme analysis with samples of the participant responses. Lastly, this chapter concludes with a summary of the results obtained from the participants and prepares for my interpretation.

Listed below are the two RQs that guided my study and helped address a gap that exists in the current literature.

RQ1. What lived experiences do academic advisors encounter during initial talent acquisition, to include recruitment, hiring, onboarding, initial training, and early staffing?

RQ2. How do academic advisors perceive the impact of initial talent acquisition on their job performance?

Participant Demographics

For this study, seven female and six male online academic advisors volunteered to share their personal experiences regarding their path on joining the academic advising career. Out of the 13 participants, nine work remotely, three have hybrid work schedules and only one still works in an office. Ten of the participants expressed that their work schedule changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic that started in early 2020. Most of them do not think their schedule will change back to what it was prior to the pandemic. The average years as an academic advisor was 6.5 years, so these volunteers are seasoned online academic advisors. All participants have a bachelor’s degree, 11 of them earned a master’s, and only two completed their doctoral study. There was no consistency with the types of major ranging from biology, accounting, education to business degree. Eight participants self-disclosed that they have some leadership responsibilities like leading a team, mentoring new employees, and partaking in training procedures. The selected population came from eight different universities, which allowed me to explore perspectives from different environments. There were no other demographics like race, age, or location because they are not directly relevant to this study that focuses on online academic advising position.

The selection process was basic. I am a member of NACADA, and I used their platform to reach out to other members and prior members of the organization. NACADA also provided a listserv within their site to increase the pool of prospects. An email, (see Appendix C) was sent out requesting for online academic advisors with three years of experience to respond to my request. A total of 15 potential participants responded to the email request, and they were sent another email (see Appendix B) with the consent form to make sure they met the criteria and were willing to be recorded for the interview. Out of the 15 who responded, only seven met the criteria and participated with the recorded interviews. Using snowball sampling with the seven participants, I was able to recruit six more volunteers who met the criteria to partake in the study. Every participant received the consent form and replied through emails before scheduling the interview appointment.

There was a total of 13 advisors who met the screening criteria who participated in the study (see Table 1). Of the 13 participants, six support bachelor's online students (46%), seven work with master's (54%), and out of the remaining seven, four advise doctoral learners as well (30%). No advisors supporting master's students do so without having earned a master's degree.

ITable 1

Participant Demographics

Participant #	Achieved Degree Level	Years of Service	Degree Program Level Supported	Work Location
P1	Masters	7	Bachelors	Hybrid
P2	Bachelors	8	Bachelors	Remote
P3	Masters	5.5	Masters/Doctoral	Remote
P4	Masters	9	Masters/Doctoral	Hybrid
P5	Masters	4	Masters	Remote
P6	Masters	3	Masters	Hybrid
P7	Masters	12	Masters	On-site
P8	Masters	8	Masters/Doctoral	Remote
P9	Masters	7	Bachelors	Remote
P10	Doctoral	5	Bachelors	Remote
P11	Doctoral	7	Masters/Doctoral	Remote
P12	Bachelors	3	Bachelors	Remote
P13	Masters	6	Bachelors	Remote

Table 1 shows that the participants' average years of being an advisor is 6.5 years, which mean they are not new to the field as seasoned academic advisors. A high percentage (85%) of participants (*n*=13) have earned a master's or higher; therefore, it demonstrates that institutions preferred candidates with higher level of education for the advising role. Only one individual still works in the office while the rest work remotely with three having a hybrid schedule.

Some of the thoughts and feelings participants shared about their level of education were not about what they studied, but more of an understanding of students' needs and the ability to relate. Participant 1 (P1) said, "I don't necessarily think that it takes any formal education. Although I think it helps. I think it helps to have the students recognize, you know, that you know what you're talking about to some point." P4 shared their belief that "with a graduate student population, a graduate degree would be helpful because then, you know, even if it's not in the same area, you've been a graduate student yourself, and so you can speak to that experience." P7 gave an example:

> I work with the social work students and my degree is in education, and I tend to really relate well to them. I think a degree matters in the sense that you can relate to what the students are going through, but I don't think for our position that would matter like as long as you have some graduate experience or even undergraduate experience.

There was an overwhelming (85%) response about the type of degree being insignificant to be an advisor, but they must have empathy for students who have challenges and communicate to build rapport prior to using experience and knowledge to find solutions. Students expect this kind of service to have positive influence on the institution's reputation.

Organizational Processes

The participants shared some of their organizational processes with regard to recruiting, onboarding, and talent acquisitions. Their descriptions were similar in many ways, especially the challenges that they believe their institutions need to address. While six participants mentioned that their department has limited institutional support, it is important that organizational processes are purposeful in supporting the advising department where they feel included and valued.

Recruiting Challenges

There was no consistency in recruiting practices and nine of 13 (70%) respondents mentioned that recruiting is siloed and always a challenge. P9 expressed the problem as, "we don't really find too many candidates. Very hard to find candidates so usually takes about a month to find anybody that's even interested in the role." P11 mentioned "we had to broaden what we're looking for and backgrounds and experiences and be open to those backgrounds and experiences and bringing them on for the people that we do recruit." While acknowledging the problem, P8 stated "I would say most recently, in my programs, we've had more internal moves than outside hires." P3 explained it perfectly:

> I feel like recruiting is a difficult one because you don't really go to school to be an academic advisor. I feel like so it's not like I have a degree in accounting and

> I'm looking for an accounting position. So, it's hard to target advisors when, you know, it's, you don't really have that background.

One of the respondents mentioned that the search for candidates must be purposeful with the ability to articulate its position and the values and skills that they want to recruit, which requires investment and support from their institution.

Onboarding

Most of the participants do not remember much about their experiences with the onboarding processes because it has been many years ago. They do agree that training needs to improve and six responded that their institutions were unprepared with its hiring practice. P6 provided an example of their experience:

> Those were the big, big problems where, where you think that, okay, you're in a position that uses tech daily, those would be the things that are like, figured out week one, you know, or in the early days, but it just wasn't and that just creates so many issues.

P3 had to go to his manager and expressed his concern about onboarding where he said, "It's hard enough right now to keep new advisors because they get overwhelmed, and this is just going to hurt us." Many of the advisors relied on their previous advisement experience to get them through their new position, since all interviewees worked in education in some form in the past prior to becoming an academic advisor. P1 said, "I would have been lost if I had come in with no advisement experience at all." P6 added, "the benefit was that I was already familiar with the university, with how the rule works and things like that and how the technology works. So, it didn't create that much of a barrier for me." It was apparent that many of these universities do not invest much into their onboarding practices when they hire new academic advisors, so they heavily rely on stealing talents from other departments within the same organization or recruit candidates from other universities. Only one participant (P13), experienced positive onboarding strategy with this statement:

> There was a good plan in place with regard to onboarding new advising staff. There was a, I don't know, call it a checklist of kind of training items that, that we would work through. Even up to, I would say two years after I had been doing the job, our coordinator and I would sit down and still refer to that checklist.

Talent Acquisition

Because recruiting is a challenge for most of the respondents, and 60% (*n*=13) participants indicated that onboarding and training need improvement, each university should consider re-evaluating their internal marketing strategy for the advising department. Internal marketing is when institutions put academic advisors as a priority and include their interest and capability within its strategic business planning. A few advisors mentioned that it is risky for their university to not invest into talent acquisition. P10 said:

> I think when your academic advisor, when they don't know, when they don't know that piece, it is difficult for others. And not only is it difficult for the other academic advisors, but it is also difficult for students because they get the brunt of it.

P4 shared the same belief:

> Advisors are very much like a front door to an institution. So, you have to be able to, you know, connect students with resources. So, there might be, you know, situation where we just fail to help a student. So, I think there's a lot of risk to not making an appropriate hire.

The talent acquisition team is believed to be extremely important to the participants. Twelve respondents stated that bringing in the wrong individuals will negatively impact other advisors. P1 shared that, "I think it would affect me negatively in a direct manner because of the training and the mentoring. It would make my job that much harder." P2 said, "I think it just become really frustrating to work in a team where, you know, there's some individuals who, who might just not get it." Students are also affected by the effectiveness from the talent acquisition team because 11 of the respondents mentioned how students depend on their advisors. An example is from P7 who said, "if they are advising students incorrectly, we may get an influx of student escalations and students, like, want changes, that, then increase our workload on that end as well." Lastly, the institution is impacted by the talent management performance especially its reputation according to nine out of 13 (70%) participants. P5 explain how the institution is impacted with this statement:

> in my role, we're working with students, like I have 400 students that I work with at a time. So, I mean, if I suck at, you know, that, like a lot of people like to put reviews online. I mean, the only reason why I know is because students tell me, like they talk, either talk about how good their service counselor is or how bad they are.

Emerging Themes

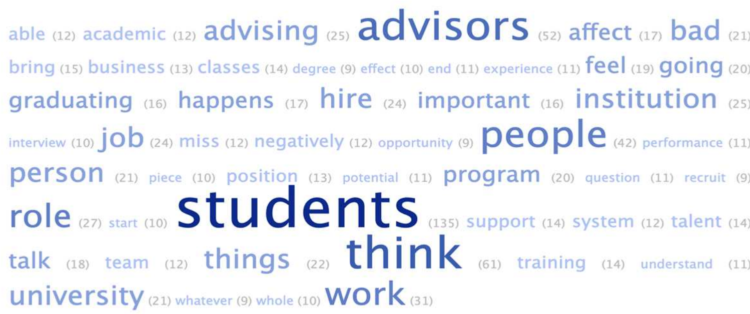
The first level of coding was the initial step in analyzing the transcripts, but the process of axial coding is when themes emerge. Grounded by the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 1 that align employee-focus theories to TM approach to support SCA principles, there were four major concepts that were critical to this study. SCA is achievable through possessing skills and characteristics from the university's academic advisors who can apply student centric learning (SCL) principles, TM is critical to support SCA, and employee-focus approach builds the foundation to successful TM.

Sustainable Competitive Advantage

Figure 2 is the word cloud articulating the participants' perception on how talent acquisition affects their job and the institution. The words (themes) generated in this area were nested with the concept of institution SCA, and the top four words are students, advisors, people, and think. The word "students" is at the top of the list because students are the primary purpose for the existence of higher education institutions. The word "advisor" is mentioned frequently as well since advisors have strong influences in student satisfaction. People are the inimitable assets for organizations if they have the right fit such as skills, knowledge, and cultural fit, which is why the word "people" was repeated throughout. Think was the fourth recurring words because the participants were expressing their perception and not representing their department or the entire field of academic advising.

Figure 2

Word Cloud for SCA



According to the participants' responses, SCA is achievable if the institution includes advisors to its short and long-term strategic planning. Eight of the volunteers mentioned that academic advisors have direct influences on the university's reputation. P2 explains it this way:

> I feel like in advising side, it's yeah, you just see it in the way students express themselves in social media. For one thing, that's just an obvious example. You just see that they're, they're more prone to venting and it's, it's that opportunity with advising that you, you can address some of those frustrations and maybe they don't end up out there (social media). So, it's just the image, the reputation of the institution quickly falters on whatever happens or doesn't in advising.

P3 said:

> Some students get frustrated because they're, well, I don't ever have a go-to-person because this individual, you know, I've been here for a year and I'm already on my third advisor; like, why are people leaving all the time? So, it

triggers over and puts a bad, you know, kind of a bad rap as far as how the student views the university.

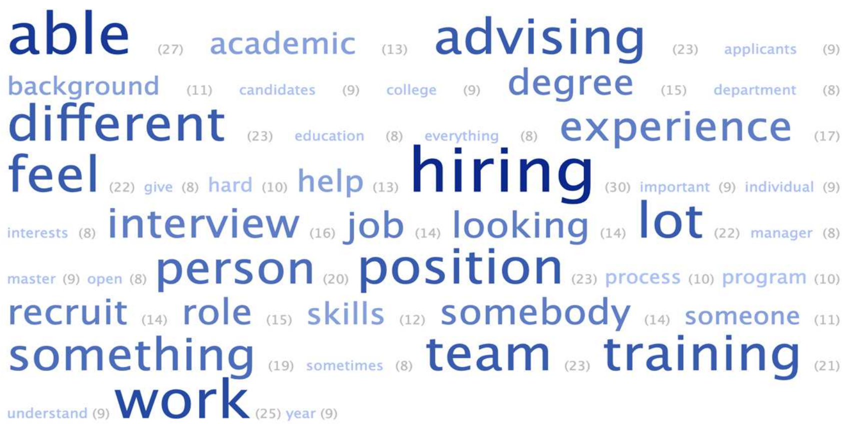
If the university's advising teams continue to contribute to negative reputation through students' word-of-mouth or social media, the university cannot sustain its growth and suffer the loss of revenue from declining enrollments, whereas positive reputation supports SCA.

Talent Management

Figure 3 is the word cloud articulating the participants description of their institution's recruiting and onboarding strategies, which was embedded in talent management principles. The words, "students, advisors, people, and think," were removed from this word cloud to depict the concept of TM. By removing these words, this visual has a distinct difference compared to the SCA word cloud. Hiring and able were the top two recurring words followed by work and training. These four words were key indicators to categorize codes into themes for meaningful data regards to managing talents.

Figure 3

Word Cloud for TM



The theme that emerged quite often in this section was about the importance of effective TM because SCA is not achievable without managing talent successfully. All but one participant agreed that placing the right candidate who fits with the team impacts other advisors. P1 expressed that their institution does not see advising as a pivotal role, which easily causes advisors to experience burnout. TM, if implemented to assist the advising role can motivate seasoned advisors and transform new employees to become productive in servicing their students, which reduces the burden of high student volumes for current advisors. P3 expressed this issue by saying:

> I think being able to recruit that talent, that's going to match with us is key. You know, when, and I even see it myself too because I've got work to do. I want to work with my students. Like, I want to get these projects done. I want to get these calls on, I want to get my onboards, but when I'm training three individuals throughout the weeks that takes a lot of time away. And there's nothing more frustrating than getting through all of that and then two weeks later, they quit or

> three months later, they quit and you're just like, oh my gosh, what? Like I just spent all that time on that, you know, so finding that talent that matches with the team, I think is huge.

P6 mentioned that hiring the right individual to the team will increase morale and encourage everyone to achieve their potential as an academic advisor; therefore, allowing group cohesion to develop and grow the institution. TM requires investment and upper management vision on the critical role of academic advisor.

Employee-Focus

Figure 4 is a word cloud echoing the participants' response about their experiences during the time when they joined the advising team and shared their thoughts about area needing improvement. The top four words in this section were "working, advising, position, and academic." These words were possible indicators to place codes into themes that were associated with employee-focus paradigm concept. Multiple themes emerge during data analysis regards to SET, expectancy theory, and SRT.

Figure 4

Word Cloud for Employee-Focus

There were multiple themes that emerged within the employee-focus paradigm. The following responses from the participants align with the employee-focus paradigm either within the SET, expectancy theory (ET), or SRT, which does not deviate from the conceptual framework in Chapter 1. P13 had a supportive supervisor who introduced and consulted him to the advising department where he naturally fit with the team. This experience aligned with SRT because the interaction with his leader guided him to seek his potential within the institution. P9 had the same experience because she said:

> A student service director of the other programs that we had online, came in and just met with me and said, hey, you know I posted this job, you haven't applied for it. What's going on? And I had been out sick, so he said, okay, well, give me your application. And, within the next week, I had the position.

P6 had a SET example, "I mean, it took time, but I feel like everybody was very encouraging and lived up to the promises. That's what they were doing as far as like, you know, recruiting me to be advising staff." P4 added another example to SET by sharing:

> She (current boss) got to know about the work that I do and what strengths I bring to advising. And so, when she had a vacancy come up in her office, she asked if I would be interested in that position, and she was specifically looking for someone to head the graduate retention team. So, I went to the job search, already knowing that barring some really weird circumstances, that I would be, you know, doing a move since it was from one college to another.

This psychological contract between P4 and her supervisor is built on trust.

There were fewer examples regarding expectancy theory, but P3 shared:

> For the first time you jump in, you're just kind of like, it's a mess. Everything is all over the place. And then, each quarter it kind of starts piecing together and I would say it takes about a year, I tell advisors that. They say six months to a year before you feel comfortable.

P3 believed incoming advisors will definitely feel overwhelmed but letting them feel that they fit within the team will help get them through the first tough year of learning the role. P1 said, "A lot of other teams in the division. Everybody was extremely welcoming, absolutely wonderfully welcoming. It was a bit intimidating walking into, you know, such a large division but the advisement team was really only one other person." Upper management promised P1 the position and asked her to lead the training responsibilities as well because they hired four full time advisors right after her. This is how she expressed her view:

> I was part of their search committees and so on, and knowing, I was going to be working very closely with them and everything else. It was great to be a part of that and to make sure that they had an experience that was different from mine.

The discovered themes indicated that advisors need to feel valued from their university, so they can take pride in their ability to apply SCL principles to help students.

Thematic Analysis

This thematic analysis used an inductive approach where codes emerge from raw data by using open coding as the first step in data analysis. Then, axial coding was applied to categorize and compartmentalize codes into themes and concept, which leads to a coding manual for deductive evaluation based on the research questions. Table 2 presents the themes for RQ 1. This thematic analysis focuses on participants' experiences and perceptions with their institution hiring, onboarding, and assigning academic advisors. The "X's" marks the participants who had comments that fit within each theme and the last column provides the total count for each theme and associated percentage. The most significant theme was: "Worked in different capacities within a university," 11 of 13 (85%) participants discussed this concept.

Table 2

Thematic Analysis for RQ 1

Themes	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	Total #	%
Internal hires		x	x	x			x			x	x			6	46
No structured training available				x		x	x			x		x		5	38
Training needs improvement	x		x	x		x	x		x	x		x		8	62
On the job training	x	x	x		x		x				x	x		7	54
Unprepared hiring practices	x		x	x		x			x				x	6	46
Shadowing / Mentoring	x	x	x			x				x			x	6	46
Recruiting is always a challenge	x	x	x	x			x		x	x	x	x		9	69
Worked in different capacities within a university	x		x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	11	85
Got into advising role fortuitously	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x		x	x	10	77
Compassion / Empathy	x	x		x		x	x	x		x			x	8	62
Handle Stress from students and self	x			x			x	x	x			x		6	46
Ability to relate to students	x	x	x	x		x	x			x		x	x	9	69
Willingness to learn	x	x	x	x				x			x	x		7	54
Preferred Master's degree level				x			x		x	x	x	x		6	46

Table 3 lists the themes for RQ 1 with an example participant's response for each one. The example responses for each corresponding theme illustrate the data analysis process used.

Table 3

RQ 1 Examples of Participant Responses from Identified Themes

Themes	Participant Response Examples
Internal hires	It's an interesting question. I was already a temp, actually working here from a temp agency and saw the position or was told about the position from other people. Within the advising staff and that they it was very encouraging
No structured training available	Even during the training process, it created issues. Again, the benefit was that I was already familiar with the institution, I'm familiar with how the rule works and things like that and how the technology works. So, it didn't create that much of a barrier for me, but I saw it and pointed it out and I was like listen if it was anybody else, coming here first week it would be a huge problem.
Training needs improvement	I think what could have been improved on was just the training process. And the actual onboarding once you started the position.
On the job training	Two weeks (training). Yes. Yep. On your own and good luck.
Unprepared hiring practices	When it came to maybe some of the logistics and some of… there was not necessarily a template for what I should be doing and how I should be spending my time. And a lot of that, in part was because of the position had been vacant for a couple of years before I came into it. And there had been a lot of changes in that time.
Shadowing / Mentoring	And yeah, I… I feel like they probably spent a good chunk of time with the manager, and they were doing face to face video conferencing. And then there would often be opportunities where they simply reach out with a question either to one of us who had been, you know, serving and then or just throw it out in our team chat.
Recruiting is always a challenge	So as far as recruiting, I mean, it makes it tough on awareness, you know, like how do you pick which ones and then I think that's where a lot of it comes down to is leadership and management, really focusing on the health of their team and making sure everybody's working,
Worked in different capacities within a university	So that's how I sort of got into post-secondary. From there, I moved into an admissions role. And then from there, I moved into a prospective student advising role on the admissions role. And that's sort of in that prospective student advising role, student Financial Aid, new program, advising, admissions, advising, that sort of thing. And so, then that sort of opened the door for me to go into academic advising to become a little bit more specific in working with students who had already been admitted to institutions as opposed to prospective students.
Got into advising role fortuitously	And luckily, there's the university and I was able to get my foot in the door, you know? So, it was more, more of a fortuitous thing instead something that I was determined to get into academic advising.
Compassion / Empathy	I think in any program just being in an online environment, sometimes we are the only adult interaction they sometimes have. So being able to be that go to person, but also having the ability to say no, or provide experience, you know, being able to have those difficult conversations,
Handle Stress from students and self	Understanding how to navigate conflict and, you know, counsel students on how to navigate conflicts that's especially important with our graduate students.
Ability to relate to students	Okay. Um, I would look for similarities with the population that they'll be working with. I would look for that because you've got to be able to relate to your student body, otherwise, you're not going to… it's not going to work.
Willingness to learn	I don't necessarily think that it takes any formal education. Although I think it helps. I think it helps to have the students recognize, you know, that you know what you're talking about to some point, but I would say Attention to detail. You know, especially like someone you're saying outside of higher ed, that would,
Preferred Master's degree level	I think a degree matters in the sense that you can relate to what the students are going through. But I don't think for our position that would matter like as long as you have some graduate experience or even undergraduate experience, just you can relate to the student on what it was like going to school and trying to juggle different things.

Table 4 presents the main themes for RQ 2. This thematic analysis focuses on the participants' perception of the impact of initial talent acquisition, which determines the institution's ability to achieve SCA. The "X" marks the participants who had comments that fit within each theme, and the last column provides the total count for each theme and the associated percentage. The most significant theme was: "Impact on other advisors," 12 of 13 (92%) participants discussed this concept.

Table 4

Thematic Analysis for RQ 2

Themes	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	Total #	%
Impact on other advisors	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	12	92
Impact on students	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	11	85
Impact on institution	x		x	x		x	x	x			x	x	x	9	69
Limited institutional support for advisors	x		x			x		x	x	x				6	46
Build trusting relationship	x		x	x		x					x			5	38
Affects reputation		x	x	x	x	x	x					x	x	8	62
High risk if not investing in talent acquisition				x		x	x			x				4	30

Table 5 lists the themes for RQ 2 with an example participant's response for each one. The example responses for each corresponding themes illustrate the data analysis process used.

Table 5

RQ 2 Examples of Participant Responses for Identified Themes

Themes	Participant Response Examples
Impact on other advisors	like we were struggling during those three months when that person was on the team, because they weren't doing their work. It was like if we never hired somebody, but still was dealing with overly escalated students because of something had been advised to them that was incorrect. We shouldn't have to do that,
Impact on students	And then flip side of that would be if they are advising students, we may get an influx of student escalations and student like want changes that then increase our workload on that end as well. So, I think bringing in the right people, for them makes students happy because then they're getting the right advice.
Impact on institution	I think it depends on if they present a clear picture of what the role is. You'll have less turnover. And I think that's been a huge issue with our college is that turnover rate and that burnout rate
Limited institutional support for advisors	I've already been through two three advisors, you know, it seems like nobody wants to stay and then they're not getting the support they need, and you know, on top of that, so it's just yeah, it has a whole negative effect around so.
Build trusting relationship	If a student is engaged and feels that they've established that relationship with their advisor, and they, they trust, I mean, it takes trust from the very beginning, you know, and you but you've got to build that. If they trust they're going to, they're going to persist.
Affects reputation	But if we don't have the right people in the positions then if students continuously get wrong advice, get misled, take classes they don't need then that could relate to a bad experience for that student which then word of mouth happens. You know that student tells three friends you tell three friends, you know, it could really implement the bottom line.
High risk if not investing in talent acquisition	You know, advisors are very much like a front door to an institution. So, you have to be able to, you know, connect students with resources. So, there might be, you know, situations where we just fail to help a student. So, I think there's a lot of risk to not making an appropriate hire.

Unexpected Outcomes

This research had some unexpected outcomes that were important and needed mentioning. One, every participant worked in the education field in some form before becoming an academic advisor. Some came from the enrollment team, others worked in the frontline (customer service), three did residency life, three were teachers, and one came from disability service. They all had experiences working with students in some capacity that contributed to their success as academic advisors. Two, on-the-job training was significantly utilized, but it was unstructured and depended on other advisors' willingness to train. Yet over 60% of participants (n=13) agreed that training needs improvement since it takes a minimum of 6 months to a year before a new advisor can feel comfortable in the role. Three, advisors will need a degree (the type of major is irrelevant) to gain empathy, relatability, and the ability to guide students through school resources. All advisors who work with graduate students have earned a master's degree or higher. Lastly, 10 of 13 (77%) participants ended up as academic advisors fortuitously because the advising position was never seen as a career path; if anything, many of them did not understand the role until they were introduced to it while working within a university at a different capacity.

Summary and Transition

In this chapter, the results of this study regarding the lived experiences of academic advisors' initial stages of the talent management process in terms of hiring, onboarding, and staffing for the advising department that support online students are provided and analyzed. It starts with a restatement of the research questions before detailing the participant selection process. Those who participated shared their experiences verbally, which were recorded and transcribed into text as data. Next, an explanation of how themes emerged through a systematic data analysis process that was grounded by the conceptual framework. Finally, the chapter shared a few unexpected outcomes from the research, all while using participants' samples with direct quotes throughout this section.

In Chapter 5, a summary about the results is shared to discuss about the interpretation that tied the findings to the research questions. Here, I addressed the gap in literature regarding the strengths and challenges for higher education institutions to achieve SCA through the advising department particularly in the initial stage of talent management. The feelings and perceptions from participants who were selected through purposive sampling strategy are detailed with further discussion about the limitations and delimitations of the data. Lastly, Chapter 5 is where I provide recommendations for further studies that can promote positive social change through the advising role because of its ability to connection with students and those who are affiliated with higher education.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

I focused on a phenomenological exploration of the experiences and perceptions of academic advisors about their universities' talent management for the academic advising position that supports online students to achieve SCA. The findings came from 13 seasoned academic advisors from eight universities who shared their experiences and perceptions regarding the talent management processes. By analyzing the data, I exposed an array of themes that aligned with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and provided unexpected outcomes to address the two research questions. This chapter is where I provided the interpretation of the findings following the research questions before discussing the comprehensive phenomenological study on this topic. Next, I addressed the limitations and delimitations to strengthen the validity of the research. Lastly, I offered recommendations for future research, followed by the conclusion of the dissertation upon which I conveyed the implication for social change.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings from this research confirmed that the academic advising position is not recognized as a career path when 10 out of 13 (77%) participants mentioned that they ended up as an academic advisor fortuitously and no volunteers pursued a degree in advising. This finding tied directly to the outcomes from McGill (2019) about the obstacles that prevent the job of academic advisor from being recognized as a profession. This also tied to Larson et al. (2018) about the lack of cohesive definition for the advising role, therefore contributing to the challenges of finding the right candidates for high quality advisors. The results were confirmed and aligned with the current literature in

Chapter 2 that addressed the two research questions. The research questions were paralleled to the conceptual framework that identified:

1. SCA and its principles according to Coyne (2001) research.
2. Heinen and O'Neill's (2004) suggested TM practices.
3. Gupta et al. (2018) proposed context about onboarding.
4. Santos and Goncalves (2018) recommendation to use internal marketing to achieve employee's satisfaction.

Research Question 1

The first research question was: *What lived experiences do academic advisors encounter during initial talent acquisition, to include recruitment, hiring, onboarding, initial training, and early staffing?* Each of the participants shared their experiences and perception on the initial stage of talent management for the advising department. Themes and concepts emerged through their responses that were transcribed into a word document for data analysis. Noticeable outcomes show many of the institutions do not follow Heinen and O'Neill's (2004) ten key factors in successful talent planning, which explain why many participants believe recruiting is always a challenge. Another concept discovered during data analysis exposes some missing criteria to achieve Bauer's (2010) four Cs of onboarding strategy to harness new employees' knowledge, skills, and abilities. Lastly, participants have an agreement that effective advising should use the three conceptions of student-centric learning based on Klemencic (2017) research on developmental strategies for higher education.

The first subquestion: *What are the missing factors for a successful academic advising talent planning?* Out of the 10 factors for successful talent planning, only one was mentioned multiple times by 60% of the participants which was on-the-job training (factor 8). The advising department depended on seasoned advisors to assist with new hires while they are on-the-job training by taking calls and assisting students with their needs. About half of the interviewees relied on their previous advisement experience to get them through the training period since most of them worked in a university prior, but in a different capacity. There was an agreement that training needs improvement. The rest of the factors were seldom discussed or even mentioned; only one person believed that their leaders are supportive of the advising department. Another participant said hiring is more reactive than proactive, so business development is not forward-looking and no mentioned about a developmental strategy to build multiple talent pools or career paths. Many participants said referrals from other departments or colleagues is where they find the most success. Effective talent management must start from the top because upper management can set the standard to address all ten factors to attract and retain high quality advisors who are valued and inimitable.

The second subquestion: *What are the missing criteria for the four Cs of onboarding?* The four Cs of onboarding are compliance, clarification, culture, and connection. Compliance should be an easy task to accomplish because it deals with basic tangible items; yet, at least five participants indicated that their institution was not prepared when they hired them as academic advisor. They struggle through the first couple of months and used their previous experiences to succeed in their role but indicated that they can see why new advisors tend to quit within the first six months. Clarification is about learning the expectation as a new person on the job and participants said their direct manager is the one who provides this task. There is no standard of practice to accomplish this task and it will depend on that manager's skills and abilities. The last two items are culture and connection. Cultural fit was discussed by five members who believe it should a focus and there is a consensus by most that one bad advisor can negatively affect the team. The team's culture must enjoy helping students according to eight participants and should believe that education is a priority. Connection builds good relationship in the workplace which was mentioned at least five times throughout the study, but there was an unknown aspect, and it was about how their institution can establish connection when majority of the participants transition to work remotely because of COVID-19. They lose the face-to-face interaction to connect with new team members. If an institution wants to reduce the challenges of onboarding for the advising department, it needs to address some of these shortfalls and utilize internal marketing strategies.

The third subquestion: *How is student-centric learning utilized in the advising department?* According to Klemencic (2017), there are three distinct conceptions: "a pedagogic concept to foster individual learning, a cultural frame for developing communities of learning and a lever supporting system." (p. 73). Eight participants shared their belief that advisors must be willing to learn holistically, which aligns with adult learning characteristics to encourage students to develop self-directed learning (Lema & Agrusa, 2019). This process coordinates with the pedagogic concept. Nine participants considered a community of learning to occur when advisors can relate to students and use their communication skills to handle students' stress while addressing individual needs by introducing adequate resources. Resources include a community of faculties, program directors, administers, and student affairs, so the advising role is not just about registering students into the correct courses. Last of all, advisors need their institution to have a supporting system that allow them to manage three to five hundred students within their cohort. A couple of advisors concurred that they must balance service quality with quantity because they work in a fast-paced environment. Without an effective supporting system, they would have to sacrifice quality because the institution will not reduce their cohort size.

Research Question 2

The second research question was: *How do academic advisors perceive the impact of initial talent acquisition on their job performance?* There were two interview questions to address this research question. One was about how it impacted their job performance and the other was about the institution performance based on the interviewees' perception. The data were clear: high quality advising strengthens an institution's SCA in two ways. First, placing the right candidates to the advising department generates motivation and inspiration to the advising team. High quality advisors take pride in their work and are willing to train new hires who are competent because they know it will benefit the team and the students that they advised. The outcome means the institution can sustain growth without sacrificing quality. The opposite is true as well. Without proper investment into hiring, the team will question the institution's support for advising and induce negative morale, which corresponds with 12 participants' belief. Second, eight participants shared their experiences in which students post their experiences about the institution on social media. Participants believe high quality advising is the best method for advisors to address students' distress and help find solution to keep them engaged with the university, therefore reducing the negative reviews on social media and create a reputation that students are a priority. The participants believe that investing in the advising department can increased employees' engagement and gain the capability to sustain growth with more enrollments.

Discussion

The 13 participants who volunteered to share their experiences and perceptions regarding their institution's initial talent management processes have provided invaluable data for this study. six men and seven women experienced online academic advisors contributed to the body of knowledge of how institutions can sustain growth in a competitive field of higher education. The participants gave insight as to how the advising role connects directly with online learners, which influence their engagement to increase student satisfaction through interpersonal and instructional interaction. This student-advisor relationship is the intangible asset for higher education institutions because it is the gateway to transfer knowledges. Advisors provide information to the students with resources for academic and personal needs, while obtaining feedback and suggestion from their students that become essential data points for the institution's strategic planning. Unfortunately, academic advising is undervalued and underutilized since many participants agreed their institutions have limited support for the advising department, therefore aiding the challenges of finding candidates for high quality advisors.

Institutions must understand the role of the advising department before they can acknowledge the value of their advisors. In Chapter 2, I provided multiple literature citations explaining how academic advising plays a significant part to retain and graduate students in a scalable manner; but the position requires competent staff members with the appropriate skills and characteristics for student success. Given the fact that no participants viewed academic advising as a career path before becoming an advisor, finding talent in this area requires broadening the search criteria for potential candidates. Adding on to the difficulties, there is not a common degree major to shift through applicants' resumes. By virtue of these challenges, institutional leaders should invest and support the advising department before they can successfully manage their talent; but they need to contemplate the value within this position.

Among the factors to invest in the advising department, a strategy to increase the talent pool for advisors is critical, followed by structured on-the-job training that includes shadowing and mentoring. The outcomes from this study suggest that recruiting from other departments has an acceptable success rate, so incorporating a career path into the advising department would be ideal. The person who creates a career path strategy must encourage potential candidates to pursue a master's degree to gain empathy and relatability with the students since 11 of the 13 participants (85%) have a master's or higher. A career path can implement basic training to the advising role and weed out those who will not fit within the department. After that, candidates who are selected to become an advisor can endure the fast-paced stress of advising students without decreasing the quality of service and maintaining the institution's SCA.

Limitations

I used the findings of this study to focus on online academic advisors with their initial talent management experiences and perceptions. This qualitative study has a small population who shared a common phenomenon to provide rich data regarding online universities' hiring, onboarding, and assignments to its academic advising department. The data cannot be generalizable because of the small sample size, plus the interviewees' perceptions cannot represent the entire field of academic advising within all universities which was not intended. Another limitation of this study is the participants ability to recollect their experiences when they joined the advising team. Most of the participants have been in their position for over 4 years; therefore, time can distort their memories. It is also possible that perspectives and beliefs have changed over time. In addition, 70% of participants (n=13) transitioned into remote work because of COVID-19 right after 2020, so this study cannot account for any changes that might have occurred if the participants were not notified or trained on the changes to policies or procedures. Lastly, social desirability bias was mentioned as a limitation because I am also an experienced academic advisor that might have induced social desirability since the participants were notified from the beginning that I am also actively advising.

Delimitations

The current study was limited to academic advisors with three or more years of experience who advise online students for higher education. The purpose to limit the scope of participants was to focus on a common phenomenon regarding an institution's hiring, onboarding, and assigning individuals to engage online students so the organization can achieve SCA. The selected participants offered a unique viewpoint with relevant information to support trustworthiness and contribute to the study of academic advising. Throughout the interview process, there was no obvious signs of untruthfulness or social desirability biases; rather, participants expressed gratitude with regard to the study because they believe the advising role is being undervalued and hope that this research can contribute to positive change.

Recommendation for Future Research

The current research contributed a small piece of content to a large topic of academic advising. Further research is needed since the advising role is essential for institutions to achieve SCA. Aligned with this study and parallel to the literature in Chapter 2, the following recommendations for future research can strengthen the current knowledge about academic advisors. One, academic advising managers were not involved with this study, so further research should focus on this population. It is assumed that managers should have more of an insight about the institution's hiring and training procedures since they are responsible for the team's performance. Another recommendation is to conduct a content analysis of institutions' training procedures for academic advisors because many participants indicated that training needs improvement. Research into existing training methods can identify areas of success and outline specific pain points. Lastly, more research is needed regarding the changes to recruiting, hiring, and assigning advisors for those advising positions that permanently changed into remote work after the 2020 pandemic.

Implications for Social Change

With increasing pressure for higher education institutions to retain and graduate students, universities must find ways to adapt its business strategies to incorporate a student-learning partnership paradigm to achieve long-term sustainability, especially for non-traditional online learners. Faculty focus on teaching content and do not have the time or training to provide high quality advising (Vespia et al., 2018), so fulltime academic advisors are tasked with this responsibility. Incorporating academic advisors to students' educational journey can achieve institutional goals for SCA where students accomplish their educational need and apply their knowledge to benefit society. The need to better understand this phenomenon is what drove this research. By using the findings from this research, institutions for higher education can explore effective processes to recruit and train talents to offer high quality advising for non-traditional learners. This study thoroughly addresses this phenomenon where academic advisors are undervalued yet plays a pivotal role to students' success for higher education. Exploring these findings puts forward innovative ideas for institutions to place students as a priority without losing profit and its reputation. In general, when more students become graduates and subscribe to an educated society that works toward positive social change.

Conclusion

The results from this research should be utilized to educate those who work in higher education and address the challenges of engaging students with their institution.

Better engagement increases student success and offers opportunities for more individuals with non-traditional needs to earn a degree. High quality advising is essential for positive engagement, and the findings from experienced online advisors help shed some lights to attract and retain candidates to fit the cultural environment in helping students without additional monetary incentives to perform at a high level. By ensuring the cultural fit, students can enjoy their educational experiences and the institution maintain a positive reputation that encourages future learners to join their organization.

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Appendix A: Screening Questions

1. Are you currently working as an academic advisor?

2. Have you been at your role for 3 years or more?

3. Do you support online students for bachelor, masters, or doctoral program?

4. What is your highest level of education? What major?

5. Do you have any leadership/management responsibilities with your current role?

Appendix B: Email/Post Letter to Potential Participants

Dear Potential Participants,

My name is Binh Ngo, and I am currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Industrial and Organizational Psychology at Walden University. Part of completing my doctoral program is to design and complete a research study, which requires volunteer to participate in a 30-45-minute recorded interview through zoom meeting. As a member of NACADA, I am asking for volunteers to partake in my study who is an active academic advisor for a university that supports online students in the bachelor, masters, or doctoral program.

The purpose of this study is to understand academic advisors' perception, belief, and vision of their university's hiring, onboarding, and assignment of academic advisors. To address a gap in current research, I developed a series of questions targeting this topic that I believe you can contribute. I would like to invite you to participate in this study and help complete a research study that can benefit positive social change in higher education institutions.

Should you decide to participate, please send an email with your name to XXXXX and an email will be sent to you with an informed consent form containing more information regarding the research study.

I would very much like to have you be a part of my research study.

Sincerely,

Binh Ngo

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Interview Questions

<u>Academic Advisors</u>

1. Describe your experience during the time when the institution recruited and hired you to be an academic advisor.
2. During your process of joining the advising team, tell me what went well and what needs improvement?
3. Prior to being an advisor, describe your career/job and how it led you become an academic advisor?
4. How would you describe the current recruiting and onboarding strategies for the advising department?
5. What knowledge, skills, and ability (KSA) or characteristics should advisor possess to be a good addition to your team?
6. How does the effectiveness of talent acquisition affect your job performance as an academic advisor?
7. In an advisor’s perception, how does the effectiveness of talent acquisition affect the university’s performance?