

2023

## Effective Onboarding Strategies to Increase Talent Retention

Mark L. Carpenter  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

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Mark L. Carpenter

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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Review Committee

Dr. Janie Hall, Committee Chairperson, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Olivia Herriford, Committee Member, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Denise Land, University Reviewer, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost  
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University  
2023

Abstract

Effective Onboarding Strategies to Increase Talent Retention

by

Mark L. Carpenter

MBA, Webster University, 2005

BS, University of Louisville, 1996

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

April 2023

## Abstract

Human resource (HR) leaders are concerned about the adverse effects of employee turnover on employees and organizational success. Without a successful introduction to the corporate culture, employees may be more likely to exit their positions, resulting in higher recruitment costs and lower productivity for companies. Grounded in social exchange theory, the purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore onboarding strategies organizational HR leaders use to reduce employee turnover. The participants were six HR leaders at light manufacturing companies in the United States Midwest region who successfully reduced employee turnover. Data from semistructured interviews and publicly available documents were analyzed following Yin's five-step process. Three themes emerged: (a) develop onboarding strategies, (b) onboard capable talent, and (c) provide leadership support. A key recommendation for business leaders is to develop and implement onboarding programs that foster a sense of connection between the employee and the organization. The implications for positive social change could include personal and economic enrichment for employees, their families, and the community through reduced turnover and greater stability.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this study to my wonderful family, whom I love very much. My loving parents, Homer, and Mary taught me responsibility for oneself, the value of hard work, and commitment. To my wife, Susan, and daughter, Kristina, who supported me throughout this process, functioned as my soundposts, and sanity checks. To my siblings, who have offered me inspiration through their support and own achievements. To the young people in my life: my nephews; nieces; and sweet baby grandson, Ethan. I am excited to see you all grow and to witness the lives you build for yourselves. I hope that completing this doctoral study imparts the value of lifelong learning and the ability to accomplish your dreams and aspirations. I am grateful for this opportunity and incredibly thankful for my life and the people in it.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

### **Background of the Problem**

Organizational leaders use employee onboarding processes to align hiring practices with strategic goals, including retention. Onboarding is a learning process that introduces a new hire to the organization's cultural expectations to assist with transition and socialization (Becker & Bishb, 2019). New hires form lasting impressions of an organization within the first few days of taking a new position (Chillakuri, 2020). Positive onboarding experiences can enhance an employee's understanding of their role in the organization. Onboarding is essential; a 2020 multinational study revealed that 57% of new hires had turnover intentions within the first two years of accepting a new position (Hommey et al., 2020). Employee turnover in organizations can cost employers millions of dollars annually in replacement costs (Jabutay & Rungruang, 2020). For these reasons, employers may consider investing adequate resources in dynamic onboarding processes.

The investment and development of talent is lost if an organization's human resources (HR) strategy does not correspond with strategic initiatives. Leaders who support core HR competencies and invest in people can develop skill sets relative to the organization's needs (Sanchez et al., 2018). Therefore, HR leaders may benefit from strategizing and incorporating mechanisms emphasizing onboarding processes that create value for the organization.

### **Problem and Purpose**

Employee turnover related to ineffective onboarding processes can cost an organization up to 40% of an employee's annual salary (Friedman & Neutze, 2020). Organizations can spend as much as \$3,479 on recruiting per U.S.-based employee, equal to 92% of median monthly earnings in replacement costs (Acharya & Wee, 2020). The general business problem was that some organizations lack effective onboarding strategies that support employee retention. The specific business problem was that some organizational HR leaders in the midwestern light manufacturing industry experienced employee turnover because of ineffective onboarding strategies.

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore the onboarding strategies that organizational HR leaders used to reduce employee turnover. The sample population consisted of six corporate HR leaders who had successfully implemented onboarding strategies to reduce employee turnover in midwestern light manufacturing companies. The potential implications for positive social change of improving onboarding processes include improved employee satisfaction and financial stability that could bolster living standards in midwestern communities.

### **Population and Sampling**

According to Blaikie (2018), the objective of the study should be the basis for determination of its sample size. When applying the qualitative method, the sample size is adequate when data saturation produces no additional themes. The significance of data saturation is the quantity and quality of data needed to support the research and not the number of participants. Data saturation could support rigor and validity with three

participants in a qualitative study (Vasileiou et al., 2018). I selected a sample population of six HR leaders who had successfully implemented onboarding programs in midwestern light manufacturing companies.

I obtained participants through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling involves recruiting participants who meet established criteria and are most qualified to answer the research question (Farrugia, 2019). Researchers use purposeful sampling to validate participant qualifications and alignment with the purpose statement and research question (Morales Serazzi et al., 2021). These populations may possess in-depth knowledge relative to their roles and contribute to data saturation and validity. Spontaneous participants may possess in-depth knowledge relative to their roles to further contribute to data saturation and validity.

The location of the interview contributes to the quality of the data collected. The participant should be comfortable that the interview setting is devoid of power differentials; otherwise, the environment may induce partial responses (Nowak & Haynes, 2018). With the participant's cooperation, the interviews took place by phone to mitigate the threat of COVID-19 and any undue financial burden related to geographical constraints.

Blaikie (2018) focused on the debate of sample size and its influence on data saturation concerning what constitutes a sufficient sample size. Further, Blaikie argued that current review practices require researchers to identify precise numbers of participants before the convening of the study and, in most cases, to gain approval for the study. Although a delimited sample size provides a systematic review of studies, data

collection and quality could suffer through a definitive participant sample size. Sample inflexibility gives the potentially false perception that sample size is adequate to achieve data saturation when a final number is undetermined (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

Data saturation occurs when there is no new information gathered through additional data gathering (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Saturation occurs when data from interviews yield no new themes or discoveries in data collection. Other standards can define this determination. According to Blaikie (2018), a primary consideration in achieving saturation is the sample size. As Blaikie suggests, many qualitative researchers allocate a specific number and group of participants for interviews. When considering sample size, the study's nature and research question are the basis for the determination of the sample size, which would determine saturation (Blaikie, 2018). The population for this study was six participants. I collected data until I achieved saturation through thematic analysis.

### **Nature of the Study**

I chose the qualitative research method because it allowed me to explore certain phenomena that the quantitative method might not have captured. Researchers use three primary methods in conducting research: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Liu, 2022). I did not select the quantitative method because quantitative researchers focus on discovering whether a statistical relationship exists between predictor and criterion variables. Researchers use the quantitative method to analyze and establish statistical inference (Dawadi et al., 2021). I did not select the mixed methods approach due to its reliance on quantitative data. The quantitative aspect of mixed methods

research involves the application of statistical analysis to yield quantitative findings (Dawadi et al., 2021). The mixed method was not appropriate for this study. For the study, I opted to use the qualitative research method. As Bastable et al. (2022) noted, qualitative researchers seek to develop an exhaustive analysis of spoken words, observations, and documents. This approach was in line with the study purpose.

The research designs considered for this study were phenomenological, ethnographic, and single and multiple-case studies. Researchers use the phenomenological design to understand the participant's lived experiences about the phenomena (Kianto et al., 2019). I did not select the phenomenological design because it focuses on the individual meaning and interpretation of a phenomenon. Researchers use the ethnographic design to examine group cultures and dynamics in their environment concerning the phenomena (Alexander & Smith, 2019). The ethnographic design was not appropriate because I did not study how individuals interact within their group or cultural setting. I did not choose the single and multiple-case study designs because they rely on observations, organizational documents, and artifacts to discover and study the participant's lived experiences in their real-life context (Yin, 2018). Document review is a significant data source for single and multiple-case studies and requires access to an organization's policies and procedures (Yeong et al., 2018). I did not select a single or multiple-case design for this study. I selected the generic qualitative design for this study. Researchers use the generic design to explore the phenomenon through the lived experiences and perspectives of the participant (Jahja et al., 2021). The primary source of data is semistructured interviews with industry leaders. A significant advantage of the



generic design is that it does not require permissive access to an organization and its documents (Blom et al., 2020). The generic qualitative design was best suited for addressing the research question.

### **Research Question**

What onboarding strategies do organizational HR leaders develop to reduce employee turnover because of ineffective onboarding strategies in the midwestern light manufacturing industry?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What onboarding strategies do you use to reduce employee turnover?
2. What role does onboarding play in achieving strategic goals?
3. What elements of your onboarding program are the most successful in reducing employee turnover?
4. What elements of your onboarding program have been the least successful in reducing employee turnover?
5. How do you determine if the onboarding strategy is successful in reducing employee turnover?
6. What challenges have you faced in implementing an onboarding strategy to reduce employee turnover?
7. What additional information would you like to share about the onboarding strategies you used to reduce employee turnover?

## **Conceptual Framework**

I selected the social exchange theory (SET) as the conceptual framework for this study. Blau (1964) developed SET and emphasized the principles of reciprocal exchange between two or more participants that provide mutual benefits. Blau theorized the basis for SET as the concept of rewards and punishments for a given set of circumstances and behaviors. Using a subjective cost-benefit analysis, Peccei and Van De Voorde (2019) suggested that human relationships are voluntary and generally based on reciprocity, where each party benefits from the exchange. According to Jeong and Oh (2017), SET supports the foundation of origination and meaning by explaining mutual benefit relationships for a given set of circumstances and behaviors. Reciprocal relationships advance the benefits gained through a mutual exchange of any combination of goods, services, and information (Ferm & Thaichon, 2021). The defining concept of SET is reciprocity that validates the exchange relationship (Cappelli et al., 2019). SET offers a theoretical foundation for the rationalization of an exchange relationship between two or more parties (Shin et al., 2022). In this study, SET provided a lens for understanding the participants' work interactions and understanding the study's relevance in relation to the research question.

## **Operational Definitions**

*Onboarding*: A process designed to (a) create a sense of belonging in new employees, who develop a greater perception of commitment to the organization; (b) enhance performance, and (c) reduce turnover (Caldwell & Peters, 2018).

*Organizational socialization*: A process of role acceptance where the employee internalizes and accepts environmental norms as an organizational insider (He et al., 2020).

*Reflexivity*: A process where researchers, before undertaking a study and while conducting it, reflect on their experiences relative to the study topic to ensure that findings are devoid of researcher bias (Wadams & Park, 2018).

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

#### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are unverified truths that provide the researcher with a foundation for discovery and validation (Hristov & Chirico, 2019). The principal assumption was that participants answered the open-ended questions honestly and without reservation or agenda. A principal assumption is that the participants trusted that I managed all their participation elements ethically and per Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) standards. Finally, I assumed I had collected enough data to address the research question adequately.

#### **Limitations**

Limitations are elements that are beyond the researcher's control or the scope of the study (Bastable et al., 2022). Because of the subjective nature of qualitative studies, researchers rely on participants' personal accounts of the phenomena (Yin, 2018). Participant bias could have affected the reliability of the data collected for this research. Respondents had the option of changing their responses during the member checking process, which could have had a negative impact on the meaning of their answers.

Additionally, the participant's willingness could have affected responses to present their position or experiences in a positive or negative light in contrast to actual circumstances.

### **Delimitations**

Researchers impose delimitations to limit a study's scope and support attainable objectives (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Delimitations begin with the problem statement. Researchers use the problem statement to provide boundaries that focus the study on a specific phenomenon to reduce vagueness and identify the study's intent. Delimiters of my research were the design and number of participants. My decision to use the generic design meant that data types and specific participant events included in the study were limited (see Dvorak et al., 2020). I delimited the geographical area of study to midwestern light manufacturers. Additionally, I limited my participant pool to HR leaders with experience developing and implementing the organization's onboarding process.

### **Significance of the Study**

Ineffective onboarding strategies can foster employee perceptions that the organization does not value human capital (HC), which can contribute to reducing employee commitment and increased turnover. Becker and Bishb (2019) distinguished employee socialization from onboarding by identifying socialization as a selected social characteristic where the individual makes the concerted effort to connect with the organization. Further, organizational leaders use the onboarding process to introduce the environment and expectations to encourage integration through socialization (Cesario & Chambel, 2019). Organizational commitment is a positive attribute of an effective

onboarding program (Vaneet & Neha, 2018). Individuals and communities benefit from employment stability. Employees who identify with a lively introduction to an organization demonstrate higher commitment and productivity levels and are less likely to experience turnover intention (He et al., 2020). Successful onboarding practices contribute to reduced turnover and positive social change by maintaining a productive and stable workforce.

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

Onboarding plays a significant role in shaping an employee's view of a new organization. HR leaders who practice effective onboarding can maintain a stable workforce and demonstrate higher commitment and performance (Cesario & Chambel, 2019). From an HR perspective, talent recruitment and retention are vital determinants of policy success (Vaneet & Neha, 2018). Therefore, organizational leaders who implement successful onboarding programs are more likely to retain HC and achieve sustained operational performance and increased market share.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The social impact of onboarding could extend beyond the profitability of an organization. The costs to the individual from turnover are lost wages, breaks in employment, and the psychological stress caused by the threat of financial ruin (Virgolino et al., 2022). The effects on communities include reduced consumer spending, tax dollars lost, and a decreased tax base (Van Belle et al., 2018). Organizations whose leaders execute a successful onboarding strategy could contribute to a stable workforce increasing the standard of living for employees and their community.

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

The purpose of this literature review is to examine existing literature on onboarding strategies used to reduce turnover and maintain a stable, competitive workforce. Levitt et al. (2021) asserted that a thorough review and understanding of relevant literature enhances the study's coherence, academic rigor, and reliability as the data collection instrument. Accordingly, I conducted a thorough analysis of literature on contemporary processes that drive successful onboarding strategies. The successful implementation of these elements contributes to employee stability, competitive advantage, and a successful onboarding strategy (Haseli et al., 2021). The literature review portion that addresses the conceptual framework should align with the study (Smith, 2018). The topics analyzed in the literature review include talent management, core values, corporate brand, and attraction and retention of top talent.

The conceptual framework, SET, links current onboarding literature to the research question and the interview questions. By analyzing relevant literature, I was able to clarify the business problem and address the research question. I searched the Walden University Library and search engines, including Academic Search Complete, ABI/INFORM, Business Source Complete, Emerald, Google Scholar, and ProQuest Central, to acquire relevant literature. Also, I used citation chaining to locate relevant peer-reviewed articles published within 5 years. Researchers use citation links between publications to broaden the literature search (Hirt et al., 2020). Search terms used to find electronic resources were *onboarding*, *socialization*, *turnover*, *turnover intentions*, *employee motivation*, *employee engagement*, *organizational culture*, *corporate culture*,

*organizational development, sustainability, competitive advantage, position fit, business performance, job satisfaction, and social responsibility.* The remainder of this literature review contains a critical analysis of the substantial effects onboarding has on individual and organizational success. The study includes 202 articles and books, with 94% (190) of the literature from peer-reviewed sources. Eighty-five percent (172) of the total sources were peer reviewed with a publication date of 5 years or less from the anticipated study completion date; 15% (30) of total sources were 6 years or greater, with four articles obtained from seminal sources.

### **Onboarding Overview**

I designed this generic qualitative study to explore and analyze effective onboarding strategies used by leaders in midwestern light manufacturing. Investment in and development of talent is lost if an organization's HR strategy does not correspond with its strategic initiatives (Reina et al., 2018). SET is premised on an exchange relationship between two or more parties based on mutual benefit (Shin et al., 2022). Therefore, SET relationships revolve around the benefits gained through a mutual exchange of any combination of goods, services, and information. (Shin et al., 2022). The defining concept of SET is reciprocity that validates the exchange relationship (Cappelli et al., 2019). A thorough review of the literature supported the relationship between SET and employee onboarding.

Talent recruitment and retention are essential responsibilities of HR leaders. By understanding core HR competencies, an organization's leaders are able to invest in people to develop critical skills and objectives (Burns, 2018). HR leaders who invest in

onboarding processes create value for the organization. Stofkova and Sukalova (2020) point out that a competent workforce reflects a strategically aligned HR function which sets the foundation for employee engagement. Further, developing HR competencies that invest in people demonstrates an interest in the employee, creating value for the organization and reinforcing employee trust in relationships (Sharma & Stol, 2020). An essential first step for a new hire is the initial contact with the organization, which sets a secure foundation for the connection (De Smet et al., 2021). Through effective onboarding processes, organizations can ensure that new hires have background knowledge of goals and strategy, potentially enculturating and orienting them to their new surroundings (Caldwell & Peters, 2018). Additionally, effective onboarding contributes to internalized personal interests that translate to a committed workforce that support their leadership and achievement of organizational goals (Raheem & Khan, 2019). As commitment grows, both leaders and employees become more engaged with one another's presence and function, creating a more stable relationship (Jeong & Oh, 2017).

The purpose of workforce onboarding is to support the effective professional and operational integration of new employees (Chillakuri, 2020). Onboarding can begin before a new hire's first workday. Preboarding is a component of onboarding that occurs during the initial contact with a prospective employee before the first day of work (Shufutinsky & Cox, 2019). Early and frequent contact with new employees effectively prepares them for their first day of onboarding and keeps them excited about their new position and the company (Hills, 2022). Preboarding is an effective method of preparing



new hires for their first day of work. Workforce onboarding strategically links organizational goals and customs to employee achievement (Hommey et al., 2020). Correspondingly, the first impression of the organization the employee experiences can have a lasting impact on their performance and willingness to stay with the company (Chillakuri, 2020). Since 57% of new hires surveyed in the U.S. and the United Kingdom had turnover intentions within the first 2 years of accepting their position, the importance of successful onboarding and reducing turnover is evident (He et al., 2020). Organizations that have an effective onboarding process first have a hiring process that establishes a person, position fit before their first day of work. Neither organizations nor employees can afford excessive turnover due to investment costs and lost wages (Van Belle et al., 2018). Onboarding enables a process that makes employees feel welcomed and socialized in organizational norms and promotes a stable workforce that achieves a competitive advantage (Moon et al., 2021). Therefore, onboarding processes are the result of significant talent management initiatives designed to maintain a stable operational environment (Moon et al., 2021).

Successful talent management strategies support reliable performance and a workforce that is in tune with the achievement of organizational goals. Therefore, an organization's ability to achieve market sustainability relies on strategic decisions that enhance competitive advantage (Liu et al., 2021). Investment in onboarding achieves competitive advantage through employee programs and synchronization of HR strategies that meet organizational goals and the associate's personal and professional goals (Meyers et al., 2020).

As the development process continues to meld, strategic alignment between HR and corporate strategy reduces the risk of perceived misguided policies and actions that reduce employee trust and commitment. HC investments that incorporate productivity measures related to personnel inputs such as onboarding can provide hard, measurable evidence that HR strategies are effective (Stofkova & Sukalova, 2020). Finally, investing in people can potentially create a positive return on investment from HR talent management activities. Onboarding is an iterative process that begins with the initial employee contact and can take several weeks or months to complete depending on the positional requirements (Cesario & Chambel, 2019). There is a mutual exchange between the employee and organization during onboarding, where expectations are identified and acknowledged (Kirchner & Stull, 2021). Once accepted, expectations provide a foundation for a mutually beneficial relationship where all parties have a set of complementary objectives to work toward (Jashari & Kutillovci, 2020). Leaders use onboarding to reduce turnover and demonstrate an organization's commitment to the new hire.

### **SET as the Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework clarifies the meaning of a study by explaining relationships between conjecture and observation (Gervasi et al., 2022). The conceptual framework for this study was SET. HR leaders use SET to promote productive exchange relationships during the onboarding process (Porter, 2018). The theory's application provides a foundational lens for researchers to investigate phenomena without repeating existing findings (Smith, 2018). From an HR purview, SET offers a conceptual

framework for developing strategies unique to the organization that address operational needs (Gervasi et al., 2022). Blau (1964), who developed the SET framework, theorized its basis as the reliance on the concept of rewards and punishments for a given succession of circumstances and behaviors. According to Blau, SET developed from the rule of justice where individuals expect a fair investment to yield a reasonable return. The perception of fairness creates personal feelings of equality and goal achievement resulting from a mutually agreed-upon transaction.

Successful working relationships relate to individual expectations of contribution and achievement (Hommey et al., 2020). SET illustrates the concept of positive or negative outcomes for a given set of circumstances and behaviors (Cappelli et al., 2019). According to SET, all human relationships create a cost-benefit analysis that correlates job satisfaction and worker loyalty with positive management interactions. Additionally, higher leader engagement generates a stronger sense of commitment from employees. Verma et al. (2022) posited job satisfaction as an example of a positive social exchange outcome that correlates job satisfaction and worker loyalty with positive management interactions. Higher leader engagement generates a more robust sense of commitment from employees through effective onboarding programs (Wongsuwan & Na-Nan, 2022). Trust plays a significant role in social exchange relationships. Unlike economic exchanges that conclude with a monetary transaction, social transfers derive from respect, trust, and shared goals (Ferm & Thaichon, 2021). By applying SET principles to advanced onboarding programs, organizational leaders can maintain a competitive edge despite challenges in retaining a robust and talented workforce. SET establishes a

theoretical foundation that rationalizes an exchange relationship between two or more parties (Shin et al., 2022). The exchange relationship evolves around the benefits gained through a mutual exchange of any combination of goods, services, and information (Ferm & Thaichon, 2021). SET expresses a conceptual explanation of how effective business relationships develop. Furthermore, three broad categories characterize SET: rewards, resources, and costs (Bibi et al., 2018). SET is based on interpersonal exchanges that create value for all participants (DeBode et al., 2017). Participants form their decision to engage in a transaction by weighing the rewards, costs, and resources related to doing so (Bibi et al., 2018).

Extrinsic and intrinsic rewards derive from the exchange relationship (Victor & Hoole, 2017). Extrinsic rewards are tangible benefits derived from performing a task with the expectation of positive recognition, monetary payment, or risk avoidance (Victor & Hoole, 2017). In contrast, intrinsic rewards are nontangible, internalized feelings of fulfillment in completing a task or some other form of personal achievement (Victor & Hoole, 2017). Resources are essential to a social exchange because they fulfill the exchange transaction (Lin et al., 2019). Additionally, resources are the mechanisms that both parties use to influence each other, which transmit through mutual reciprocation (Saffer, 2019).

Social exchanges influence enduring relationships. The costs of social exchange relationships include investments in time, energy, and capital (Blau, 1964). Costs form the bond of a relationship where the participants make informed assessments of the value of the transaction (Lin et al., 2019). Prospective new hires evaluate the potential benefits

of employment during the initial contact. Employees and employers must weigh relationship costs when making employment and retention decisions to determine if the business exchange is beneficial (Jeong & Oh, 2017). Exchange costs derive from the rewards or benefits each party gains through investing their resources (Bibi et al., 2018). Positive social exchanges can influence the success of business outcomes through mutual consideration.

In professional environments, most relationships derive from mutually beneficial exchanges. Leaders who build networks through trust and commitment have contributed to employee engagement and organizational solvency (Nagpal, 2022). Employees expect fair treatment and pay as employers expect dependability and honest work. Positive exchange relationships contribute to increased employee engagement and performance. According to Hosseini et al. (2022), engaged employees demonstrate higher commitment and motivation, which translates to increased productivity. These characteristics are not limited to employee performance. At all levels, individuals who build relationships and networks through trust and commitment are more engaged, perform better, and are less likely to leave an organization (Nagpal, 2022).

SET influences most relationships. The foundations of SET are reciprocal relationships developed to achieve mutual and individual goals that produce a competitive advantage (Huang et al., 2018). According to Gervasi et al. (2022), the SET should evolve to reflect the changing nature of exchange relationships in an increasingly ambiguous global market. Mutual understanding of goals and needs supports a resilient working environment. Therefore, it is incumbent upon HR leaders to address rapid

change and a diverse workforce (He et al., 2020). Individual needs can make it challenging to realize positive outcomes consistently. The time needed to build confidence in certain business relationships may be beyond the scope of SET (Porter, 2018). Mutually beneficial relationships are a prominent component of SET. A discussion of the limitations of SET follows.

### ***A Potential Weakness of SET***

SET is based on exchange relationships that could create obstacles due to role imbalances. Shin et al. (2022) discussed three criteria that are generally present in social exchange and could reveal limitations of the theory: an initiating action, a relationship between parties, and reciprocation. A person of authority often completes the initiating step of an exchange relationship. If one party influences the other, a perceived imbalance may exist. Although an exchange exists, there is a controlling interest that initiates the action with an advantage over the other.

Perceived exchange inequalities can result in counterproductive work behaviors. According to Zhang et al. (2019), counterproductive work behaviors surface when social exchanges harm one actor or the other; they reflect a low quality of interaction. Inequitable transactions are a typical result of doing business where harmful or deviant behaviors influence the original goals and impair the exchange (Flaherty et al., 2020). Though the definitions of inequitable practices can be broad and misleading, they generally involve the misalignment of goals and strategies (Flaherty et al., 2020). The link between mutually beneficial exchanges and purposes demonstrates a two-

dimensional relationship where quality of discussion is derived from the level of help or harm the engagement generates (Shin et al., 2022).

The purpose of this study was to demonstrate the relationship between psychological contracts and tactics used to achieve adequate employee socialization. Employee socialization is defined as the methods used to convey organizational expectations and standards for the new employee to understand the cultural foundation (DeBode et al., 2017). Socialization is dependent on the employee's willingness to adhere to organizational norms.

The concept of a psychological contract refers to an individual's establishment of expectations linked to their relationship with leadership and the organization. The conceptual framework for this study, SET, involves midrange socialization. The midrange socialization model relies on context, content, and social dimensions to demonstrate socialization's impact. For socialization to support a person-organization fit, the interaction context must provide the employee with a clear understanding of their role, the corporate culture, and what they can expect from leadership (Li et al., 2022). Content provides the employee with the steps and information needed to accomplish the socialization process. These steps provide a structured timeline to reinforce understanding before moving forward (Li et al., 2022). Adequate socialization sets the tone for more positive exchange relationships as the working relationship progresses.

### **Corresponding Theories: Human Capital and Expectancy Theories**

Two theories that share similarities with SET and the concept of mutual exchange relationships are the HC theory (HCT) and expectancy theory (ET). Theoretical parities

exist in the social transactions between SET, HCT, and ET (Sanchez et al., 2018). A discussion of how each theory evolves around the expected results of an understanding where mutual needs are met based on individual investments follows.

### *Human Capital Theory*

Cost benefits should be a measure of investments in talent. The basis for HCT was economist Adam Smith's theory that investment in education and human-health capital is a means of achieving corporate and national wealth (Schultz, 1961). Through cost-benefit analysis, prospective employees have real-time information on most organizations and the ability to control their employment prospects (Motshwane & Van Niekerk, 2022). HCT is a framework of investment in the workforce through formal education and other skills-enhancing training (Burns, 2018). The HCT draws from those individuals' skill sets to acquire or possess that add a competitive advantage to the organization (Sanchez et al., 2018).

Employee development contributes to organizational success. A principal concept of HCT is investing in employees through formal and informal training (Verma et al., 2022). Although not limited to educational ventures, the HCT addresses other elements that provide a comprehensive approach to strategic HR management (SHRM; Raheem & Khan, 2019). The HCT focuses on individual development, with knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics, to increase productivity and employee satisfaction and reduce attrition rates (McCartney et al., 2021). Investing in employees can have positive benefits for the organization. By pursuing higher education, the employee can achieve higher pay, better positions, and increased productivity (Jooss et al., 2019). Though



education is the foundation of the theory, it incorporates the exchange functions relevant to compensation for knowledge and the expectation of higher wages for differentiated skills.

The HCT has evolved as a composite of other approaches. Concerning HR processes, HCT links HR management (HRM) and strategy by providing a functional relationship between employee capabilities and HR functions (Dayarathna et al., 2019). Researchers use SET to express relationships between two or more individualized concepts or constructs, reinforcing predictions about probable outcomes (Jooss et al., 2019). The conceptual framework provides a source of origination and meaning to a study by explaining relationships between conjecture and observations (Gervasi et al., 2022). Researchers use the conceptual framework to develop questions to answer during the study.

In deciding the theoretical construct for this study, the foundation was the influence HRM had on onboarding processes that reduced turnover. I selected SET due to the complexities of today's workforce and the importance of balanced social exchanges. The HCT reinforces SET with its far-reaching view on HC investment, exchange relationships, and HRM constructs.

### ***Expectancy Theory***

Vroom developed ET to investigate the expected outcomes in an employer-employee relationship (Pembi, 2019). ET is the foundational framework used to understand employees' cognitive processes for their work purpose (Lloyd & Mertens, 2018). The function of effort is to characterize motivation that is the driving force behind

goal achievement (Peccei & Van De Voorde, 2019). Goals develop through individual needs and aspirations. A challenge of ET is the identification of elements that motivate individuals to accomplish their goals and the organization's goals (Jeong & Oh, 2017). Vroom's theory of performance suggests that performance is a product of the employee's level of motivation to perform (Lloyd & Mertens, 2018). Similar to SET, the employee's motivation to act is related to the individual goals, expected gains, and the assumption that the employee will perform based on personal growth and success (Jeong & Oh, 2017). As a theoretical construct of SHRM, the SET provides a bridge between the achievements of shared goals. A reciprocal relationship's significance is achieving personal and professional goals through mutual dialogue, job satisfaction, and performance (Taba, 2018).

The cognitive processes employees apply to their purpose of work corroborate the function of ET. Employees' motivation drives their energy to achieve individual and corporate goals (Taba, 2018). Motivated employees perform better, which increases opportunities that perpetuate an effective succession of behaviors (Beltrán-Martín & Bou-Llusar, 2018). To realize employees' full potential, organizational leaders should cultivate employee motives that create a mutual sense of value and self-realization.

The challenge for SHRM is to develop strategies that address the multi-faceted views and needs of a competitive market and diverse workforce. One of the difficulties in applying ET is determining what motivates individuals to accomplish their goals and the organization (Peccei & Van De Voorde, 2019). Vroom's view of performance proposes

that performance is a product of the employee's ability to perform, depending on their motivation to act (Pembi, 2019). Employee purpose supports theory Y of the SET.

Mutual goals contribute to overall success. The employees' motivation to perform relates to their individual goals, expected gains, and the assumption that they will serve based on a mutual interdependence for success (Al Mamun & Hasan, 2017). A theoretical construct of SHRM, the SET provides the groundwork for organizational and employee achievement of mutual goals (Burns, 2018). The significance of the ET and SET relationship is that personal and professional goal achievement typically decreases turnover intentions (Virgolino et al., 2022). By implementing an effective onboarding process based on mutually beneficial exchanges, employee needs, and goals are clarified and acknowledged with expectations management (Britto et al., 2020).

### **Talent Management**

Successful talent management initiatives are vital to the survival of an organization. Strategies based on theoretical models can provide operational and HR leaders with options that develop leadership styles and approaches to fluid environments (Sagnak et al., 2019). Leadership's role in talent management is critical to the success of any organizational strategy. Management involvement is a vital component in global talent management. At all levels of talent and performance, control, process acceptance, and ownership are a leadership obligation and not just the responsibility of HRM. When addressing leader development as a segment of the performance strategy, the organization can ensure that ethical decisions are the cultural norm rather than an exception (Raheem & Khan, 2019). Organizations build capabilities by hiring and developing competent

leaders. Once leaders possess the capacity to understand the organization's intricacies and strategies, they can employ and develop a compatible workforce.

Strategic alignment supports effective talent management. A competent workforce reflects a strategically aligned talent management initiative that sets the foundation for leader engagement (Lin & Huang, 2020). Expanding global markets has created intense competition for qualified HC, a critical asset in achieving organizational goals and competitive advantage (Habibi et al., 2019). Initiatives such as key performance indicators serve multiple roles in recruiting and retaining HC. By establishing these indicators, talent managers develop performance measures and expectations for employees and provide the mechanisms for achievement. Key performance indicators are intended to align corporate strategies with employee performance and development (Hristov & Chirico, 2019). Through the strategic alignment of performance measures, organizations can remain competitive by shaping their HC to meet a global market (Loon & Quan, 2021). HRM's ability to link its strategy with operational strategy provides the workforce with needed skills, clear objectives, and long-term sustainability.

### ***Strategy and Talent Management***

Strategic planning involves a detailed understanding of corporate goals and processes. Organizational sustainability relies on executive planners' capacity to develop competitive strategies that are flexible enough to confront challenges on a global scale (Xiu et al., 2017). A primary source of competitive advantage, an organization's workforce, is one of the most valuable assets it has to affect strategy and achieve goals

(Gooderham et al., 2018). In developing a workforce, HR practices aligned with corporate strategy contribute to its enhanced performance (Jeong & Oh, 2017). High-performance work systems are systems that integrate operational and HR strategies to support goal achievement, and the workforce has the understanding and tools to perform. According to Huang et al. (2018), these systems are a combination of HRM programs that create incentives to elevate an individual's performance through investment and compensation. Such models strive to cultivate abilities, motivation, and opportunities that focus on performance achieved by directing employee behaviors (Guest, 2017). Like other models, high-performance work systems provide employees with varying levels of input and autonomy; organizations often place performance above employee well-being (Jeong & Oh, 2017). By successfully developing and implementing these systems, HR managers demonstrate their functional value as a strategic partner.

In business environments, most relationships focus on mutually beneficial exchanges. Although complimentary exchanges set the tone for workforce stability and satisfaction, it is essential to monitor the workplace environment to sustain productivity and contentment. In a seminal study, Freeman (1978) applied a labor environment to demonstrate that relative job security does not lead to job satisfaction. Freeman argues that job security may reduce turnover intentions but is only an antecedent to job satisfaction. Though job security contributes to a positive work environment, talent management practices that develop HC increase the knowledge and skill sets of the workforce experience and higher performance levels, leading to job satisfaction (Verma et al., 2022). Effective talent management processes promote knowledge enhancement

through networking, coaching, and team development (Younas & Bari, 2020). By developing tacit and explicit knowledge within an organization, higher performance levels contribute to job satisfaction and stability (Verma et al., 2022). Through complementary HR practices, corporations can develop a stable workforce and realize the benefits of investments in human capital.

Strategies must exist to locate and obtain qualified talent. Acquiring and retaining top talent in today's hypercompetitive global market should be an organization's number one priority (Zaharee et al., 2018). Because technology is at the forefront of most operational settings, organizations must acquire the talent needed to maintain a competitive advantage. According to Zhao and Detlor (2021), a corporate brand is a catalyst for attracting capable talent. Because millennials comprise the majority of the workforce and are technologically adept, they have the tools needed to research the companies that rate high in the brand and those who do not (Zaharee et al., 2018). Because organizations function on a culturally diverse global scale, developing a workforce capable of adapting to fluid and complicated environments is an operational imperative (Loon & Quan, 2021).

Talent growth requires a global outlook. The depth of complexities requires organizations to develop a technically savvy workforce that can communicate effectively and demonstrate emotional competencies that are creative and flexible (Asbari et al., 2020). To address the needs of diverse forces and globalization, talent managers must develop retention strategies that meet employee needs while maintaining competitiveness. By designing onboarding and development processes that create a sense

of belonging, employees understand the commitment to the organization, perform better, and tend to stay longer (Reina et al., 2018). Talent management and retention are essential to organizational success and are core HR functions.

### **Onboarding and SET**

Socialization and onboarding are two distinct approaches employers use to introduce new employees to the organizational culture. Onboarding is where employees encounter the organization, culture, and strategy while being given the tools to be productive workforce members (Sharma & Stol, 2020). Exemplary onboarding programs begin at the recruitment stage, socializes an employee to all aspects of the organization, and strategically focuses on supporting an appropriate fit between employees and organization. Slebarska et al. (2019) identify socialization as the internal process a new hire uses to understand and accept an organization's cultural norms. As a means of adapting to unfamiliar environments, observation and networking are specific behaviors a new employee may engage in to reinforce socialization (Slebarska et al., 2019).

Employees have different forms of integration. Consideration is a tactic employee's use to gain knowledge of processes and the cultural nuances of their immediate surroundings (Slebarska et al., 2019). The consideration method of socialization is less invasive and helps set the stage for networking. New employees develop their network through direct observations. Systems enable the employee to connect with colleagues who possess exceptional qualities that shape the culture (Slebarska et al., 2019). Positive comments and networking influence learning and performance behaviors. New hires who have positive onboarding experiences

successfully integrate and sense high organizational support levels, which alleviate turnover intentions (Badshah & Bulut, 2020). The mitigation of turnover intentions supports a stable, productive workforce.

### ***Processes and Procedures***

Onboarding processes and procedures can differ depending on the level of the position. Byford et al. (2017) provided detailed insight and contrast on the components of executive onboarding. Executive onboarding differs from employee onboarding and socialization on several planes. Although the employee onboarding process synchronizes employee functions and socialization with corporate strategy, executive onboarding is exclusively strategic. The contact and influence organizations exercise involve the board of directors and government entities at all levels. The cost of executive-level failure can have a lasting financial and psychological impact on an organization (Byford et al., 2017). Many senior executives recruited from the outside require executive onboarding to synchronize individual qualifications with corporate goals and strategy. Critical onboarding areas such as providing outside hires with inside views are mitigated by providing the new executive with situational analysis (strategic onboarding activities), which provides a vital understanding of the executive's role (Xiu et al., 2017).

Corporate executives play a unique role in successful onboarding. The strategic approach to onboarding helps the executive gain an insider perspective of organizational needs regarding employee-job fit and accelerates the onboarding process (Sharma & Stol, 2020). Leaders should clearly understand the relationship between psychological contracts and tactics used to achieve adequate employee socialization. Employee



socialization conveys organizational expectations and standards to the new employee to have a cultural foundation to work from (Batistic, 2018). Achievable social arrangements rely on context, content, and social dimensions to demonstrate the impact of socialization (Caldwell & Peters, 2018). The psychological contract concept is where the individual establishes expectations linked to their relationship with leadership and the organization.

The psychological contract forms the employee's willingness to conform to the corporate culture. For socialization to support a person-organization fit, the interaction context must provide the employee with a clear understanding of operational roles, the corporate culture, and leadership (DeBode et al., 2017). Content provides the employee with the steps and information needed for socialization. Context and material provide a structured timeline to reinforce understanding before moving forward. Adequate socialization sets the tone for more positive exchange relationships as the working relationship progresses (DeBode et al., 2017). Socialization is unique to the employee and greatly influences a positive perception of the psychological contract.

Employees must understand their role in strategic goal achievement. Successful onboarding programs often demonstrate a person-organization fit through enhanced performance and workforce stability. According to DeBode et al. (2017), socialization and onboarding differ because onboarding is a process that enhances socialization. Socialization is the conscious acceptance of the organization's employee's culture and values (Kirchner & Stull, 2021). Though onboarding brings these elements to light, the employee must embrace them to support a person-organization fit. The employee is equally responsible for the process of success. As a participant and novice within the

establishment, the member is responsible for accepting or rejecting the socialization tactics. If the member denies the content, then successful socialization within the organization is unachievable (Gregory et al., 2022). Adequate socialization generally reflects a successful onboarding experience.

Employee turnover is costly and mitigated through positive social experiences. According to He et al. (2020), employee turnover intentions can be as high as 57% within the first 2 years of hire. Turnover is attributed to the processes HR managers use to onboard and socialize new hires. Successful onboarding processes set the foundation for a new hires' ability and willingness to accept the organization's social norms. Onboarding is a function of the organization; socialization is a conscious decision made by the new hire based on initial impressions (Batistic, 2018). When employees start their first day in a unique position, that first day is their first and most lasting impact.

Onboarding establishes expectation management and socialization for new employees by introducing them to the corporate culture and role. If the onboarding process is effective, turnover intentions diminish, productivity and sustainability increase (Moon et al., 2021).

Workforce reliability plays a key role in collective success. Organizations that effectively practice onboarding maintain a stable workforce and demonstrate higher commitment and performance levels (Becker & Bishb, 2019). By focusing on actions such as assigning sponsors to new hires, initial expectations of reception are met. Sponsors that welcome the new hire and walk them through the process advance exceeded expectations of the program's value, creating an immediate sense of belonging

(Cesario & Chambel, 2019). Further, employee socialization differs from onboarding by recognizing socialization as a distinct and individual characteristic (Woodrow & Guest, 2020). The individual makes a concerted effort to connect with the organization through socialization. The decision point for the employee occurs during the initial contact with the organization.

The key to a successful introduction is the employee's perception that the organization can meet their personal and professional needs. Effective onboarding processes empower the new hire to understand better the working environment and expectations that support a willingness to integrate through socialization (Becker & Bishb, 2019). Finally, Woodrow and Guest (2020) demonstrate that employees who are welcomed on their first workday by an engaging and genuinely interested supervisor are more likely to stay with the organization in a more productive capacity. A festive reception enhances the employee's sense of organization and sets the tone for a continued, positive working relationship with the leadership and organization.

### ***Turnover Intentions***

Turnover intentions are indicative of an unfavorable initial contact with the organization. Turnover intentions exist when employees perceive that their expectations are unmet due to conflicting values (Vaneet & Neha, 2018). To illustrate employee expectations, factors that influence the implementation of individualized pay-for-performance (I-PFP) are discussed. I-PFP are incentives organizations use to increase performance and minimize turnover (Gooderham et al., 2018).

As a core function, I-PFP's help aligns HR strategy with organizational goals of improved performance, capacity, and talent management. Although there is empirical evidence supporting increased productivity and employee stability, there are conditions that can shape the successful implementation of I-PFP. Two critical factors can limit success: cultural and environmental influences and their impact on a firm's ability to employ I-PFP programs (Gooderham et al., 2018). The use of a quantitative survey sampled 4,207 firms across 26 countries. Native cultures are a determining factor of I-PFP implementation and success. European countries such as Germany demonstrate little success in I-PFP programs due to their regulatory and labor constraints. Because high rates of unionism and related cultural standards are prohibitive, I-PFP programs are almost impossible to employ. Countries with less regulatory intervention are more successful at I-PFP implementation due to lessened restrictions and increased leader autonomy. The significance of the findings affects multinational corporations and overseas expansions (Gooderham et al., 2018). As a strategic partner, HRM can guide regulatory issues that may influence operational success.

Employee-organization fit is central to employee retention. Reina et al. (2018) discussed poor selection and onboarding processes as primary reasons for exceptional turnover. Team members receive a detailed overview of team functions, benefits, and expectations then are brought in as members within their 1st year. Additionally, the team developed an onboarding program that addressed the early development of team members and time constraints produced by a university environment. Belizon and Kieran

(2021) identified two types of onboarding: institutional and relational. Institutional onboarding addresses the more administrative aspects of a new hire.

In contrast, relational onboarding focuses on the team members role with the organization in a more personal, firsthand way. The mentor program divides into specific groups based on team membership and experience where the member's position is a permanent presence throughout the process (Cai et al., 2021). Additionally, the mentor approach establishes a succession plan as the member develops into a mentor over time and experience. The mentor program is a self-perpetuating process that supports fit and stability in the workforce.

Reduced labor costs contribute to organizational success. According to Asbari et al. (2020), turnover costs increase directly to higher technical expertise levels. The cost of a wrong hiring decision is up to five times the new hire's annual salary. Additionally, costs incurred through wrongful termination litigation and the impact on the corporate brand. For example, most information technology organizations focus on the hard skills of a hiring action and less on soft skills. Hard skills are the technical knowledge required to perform the work, are generally transferable, and quickly evaluated (Asbari et al., 2020). Soft skills relate to an individual's ability to communicate and interact appropriately within the organization and overall amicability in a working environment. What is observable is that soft skills are more critical as the workforce globalizes, and communications skills become a prerequisite for competitiveness.

Mitigation to turnover is an effective onboarding process. New hires may experience turnover intentions within the first week of employment, dependent on first

impressions. Jeong and Oh (2017) reference a friend or mentor's assignment as one of the most effective ways to meet a new hire's immediate needs. Having an experienced coworker to guide the process, feelings of indifference moderate, and achieve an immediate greater sense of belonging.

Strategic talent management plays a significant role in the success of an organization today. The impact employee turnover has on competitive advantage can no longer be ignored as it relates to a shortage of skilled personnel (Van der Heijden et al., 2018). Key determinants that reduce turnover intentions are job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Sharma & Stol, 2020). Organizations that provide the workforce with a positive environment where employees feel like they influence goals are trusted and fostering a work-life balance can maintain a stable workforce. The key to a positive working environment is the leader-member relationship. Leaders that embrace the transformational leadership style provide the support and character that cultivates a positive environment. Members who perceive a positive, supportive environment are more committed to the organization and less likely to demonstrate turnover intention (Woodrow & Guest, 2020). If the onboarding process is effective, turnover intentions diminish, productivity and sustainability increase (Moon et al., 2021). A robust onboarding process demonstrates an organization's commitment to employees and welcoming culture.

### **Corporate Brand**

Corporate reputation is imperative to garnering and maintaining a capable workforce. Employer branding, similar to product branding, involves organizational

features that positively distinguish one employer from another (Liu et al., 2021). Similarly, an organization's distinctive products create a competitive edge; employer branding provides prospective candidates with intimate details, both intended and unintentional. HRM plays a pinnacle role in developing and projecting an organization's brand (Zhao & Detlor, 2021). As a strategic partner, HRM is responsible for recruiting qualified talent that meets strategic organizational needs.

The corporate brand evolves from a broad range of benefits and organizational cultures that attract and retain talent. The retention of talent maximizes a competitive advantage through increased productivity and workforce stability. A comprehensive approach to talent retention begins with an effective strategy that attracts talent and ends with an onboarding process that develops and supports a lasting, working relationship (Chapman, 2018). The first step in the process is the development of the corporate brand. Organizations must align recruitment and hiring strategies with the brand. Through a positive brand, organizations can demonstrate the value a prospective employee could gain by working for them. Preboarding allows organizations to convey their corporate brand to new hires before their first day. Conveying a positive image of a company reinforces the new-hires decision to accept employment (Hills, 2022). The final phase of the process involves onboarding the new employee (Chapman, 2018). Positive branding encompasses all employee benefits and future opportunities available with the organization. The onboarding process should give the employee the knowledge needed to perform and confidence that they are a welcome team member.

Prospective employees can explore organizations due to vast social media outlets. Organizations with mentorship programs as part of the more extensive onboarding process can better obtain and retain top talent in a competitive global market (Rich & Rich, 2021). By developing a comprehensive program that establishes the corporate brand of equitable treatment and individual growth, organizations can increase market share and retain talent (Li et al., 2022). The combination of shifting demographics and economic globalization are creating talent gaps and shortages. Although the current workforce comprises four generational cohorts, two of the most experienced groups, the traditionalist, and the baby boomers, have retired or are retiring (Beltrán-Martín & Bou-Llusar, 2018). Multiple cohorts, coupled with the increasing pressures of global migration and staffing multinational corporations, have placed further strain on the talent pool. Because of shifts in demographics and increased workforce mobility, organizations must develop a multicultural environment that acquires the level of talent needed to remain competitive on a global scale. According to Alon et al. (2018), businesses that foster high cultural intelligence can better recruit and retain a highly educated workforce, open to change, and possess a multicultural background. In addition to reduced turnover and increased employee commitment, organizations that embrace and cultivate diversity had a more reliable brand that contributes to sustained performance and market share (Sheppard, 2018). Organizations that embrace workforce diversity develop a competitive advantage relative to a convergence of knowledge and lived experiences that competitors may not realize.



With the prevalence of social media and other news outlets, the publication of missteps is almost instantaneous. Because there are so many social media outlets, and information is generally real-time, organizations should adopt corporate and employee branding as a strategic imperative (De Smet et al., 2021). Due to increased competition for qualified talent, organizations must demonstrate that they are brand ethical organizations with a positive work environment (Theurer et al., 2018). Not only does using social media as a means of recruitment broaden an organization's reach, but the corporate image communicated has the potential of attracting better-qualified candidates (Schaarschmidt et al., 2021). Organizations today should not underestimate the considerable influence social media has on their corporate brand and operation.

Whether a brand crisis results from an unintended oversight or unethical behavior, a timely and transparent response is crucial for an organization's existence. According to Zhao and Detlor (2021), a brand crisis occurs when an organization behaves poorly and receives publicity. With small local or regional organizations, negative publicity is devastating due to permanent damage. Larger organizations can recover that smaller organization's lack (Salvador & Ikeda, 2018). Portal et al. (2018) discussed brand anthropomorphism, which assigns human characteristics to inanimate objects. Brand anthropomorphism is where the consumer views the brand as being capable of emotional attachment and reverence. These deep feelings build on ethics and trust (Portal et al., 2018). With the prevalence of media outlets and immediate information gratification, the corporate brand is a crucial characteristic in recruiting top talent (Kitsios et al., 2020).

Organizations must take measures to ensure that their reputation reflects an organization to work for in a hyper-competitive talent market.

Organizations convey high ethical standards by developing and enacting strategies that place customer well-being first. Through ethical behavior and positive messaging, an organization is competitive by acquiring and retaining top talent and achieving a competitive advantage in its market segment (Yaseen et al., 2018). Linking social responsibility and change initiatives to core strategies create an environment that places people and community before profits and market share (Kitsios et al., 2020). People support socially responsible organizations, and socially responsible organizations develop a brand that creates customer loyalty. Social investments are noticed and contribute to sustainable growth through an increased customer base (Kitsios et al., 2020). The key to cultivating a positive social image is prioritizing ethical policies and behavioral processes during strategy development.

To attract and recruit a talented workforce, organizations must develop a brand that makes them attractive, where people want to work. With social and news media at the push of a button, corporations must be ever mindful of the image they cultivate and convey. As a method of developing a corporate brand, Portal et al. (2018) applied the concept of brand anthropomorphism. Anthropomorphism is the humanization of the corporate brand. The primary attributes are warmth, trust, and ethical. Although brand anthropomorphism ascribes to existing brands, it correspondingly applies to the corporate brand. Portal et al. developed a comparable four-stage model that organizations use to build a personal brand with the final stage of the particular brand encompassing loyalty,

reputation, and relationships. When considering the type of corporate brand that attracts talent, attributes such as trust, ethics, and genuineness creates an atmosphere that is humanized and supportive.

Positive, trusting relationships are vital in humanizing a brand. By creating a personal brand, organizations can convey to potential talent pools that they are an organization that is loyal and authentic in reputation (Portal et al., 2018). For a corporate brand to thrive, strong leadership and robust strategies and processes must be in place to compose an authentic brand. High involvement management practices provide the catalyst to merge agile methods that develop people, customer satisfaction, and market-share (Jooss et al., 2019). For organizations to attract and retain talent, they must first build a reputation that makes people want to work there.

### **Recruitment of Capable Talent**

Attracting capable talent is paramount to the operational success of an organization's strategy. Acquiring qualified talent has become a global challenge. As technology closes the gap between continents, prospective employees have increased options and greater mobility in their job search (Hanaysha et al., 2022). Key to talent management is SHRM that secure and develop a workforce that creates a competitive advantage (Raheem & Khan, 2019). Cai et al. (2021) identify how a well-developed mentorship program guides an organization when acquiring talented employees. Turnover costs to organizations can be as high as \$11 billion annually; therefore, strategies must be in place to obtain and retain top talent (Deng et al., 2022). Well planned mentorship programs create a greater sense of belonging in a new employee,

increase skills, capacity, and performance. Because the multi-generational workforce presents unique challenges, employers should engage new hires and address the generational nuances. The new hire's enculturation is more productive by providing qualified mentors who possess experience and strategic insights. Additionally, individual development increases engagement, performance, and job satisfaction; all of which reduces turnover.

Organizations rely on people for their long-term success. High turnover rates or even the loss of a top performer can have a ripple effect throughout the company. Younas and Bari (2020), discussed several elements that encompass maximum talent retention. The implication is the war for talent involves a rigorous personnel strategy that has sound recruiting criteria that set the pace for the life of the individual's employment. Beyond selection, the most effective weapon in retaining talent is the careful management of top job candidates. According to Gregory et al. (2022), a performance management system extends beyond the traditional fee-for-service (high wages) approach necessary for retention. Companies with vital performance management programs employ several best practices, including aligning personnel requirements with corporate strategy, objective assessments in hiring, and job rotations that match their developmental goals and experiences with future needs (Allahar, 2018). The purpose is to retain talent through a targeted performance management package that is strategically aligned both individually and organizationally.

Like their operational counterparts, HRM must determine if their programs and processes are effective and value-added. Haseli et al. (2021), developed an approach that

incorporates workforce analytics and analytics vision and a strategic HRM perspective. Referred to as the agile development process (ADP), this process integrates HR processes with corporate strategy to create a continuous improvement cycle. By melding operational and HRM analysis with strategic goals and the organization's current state, decisions result from the findings. These data-driven decisions apply real-time data that provides responsiveness and flexibility to current issues and the added value of developing future needs assessments of the current market situation. A strategic HRM perspective is a framework that provides a sequential display of the data sets that contribute to the decision-making process (Haseli et al., 2021). A strategic HRM perspective is an analytic tool designed to give leaders a holistic view of strategic actions and the impact current initiatives have on operational goals. HRM should demonstrate how processes such as talent acquisition and retention create value and support the organization's competitive edge (Liu et al., 2021). HR analytics must be able to convey HRM's contribution to the bottom line. For instance, recruiting initiatives attract top tier performers, how onboarding programs retain them, and the cost savings associated with the applications.

### **Employee Engagement and SET**

Leader competencies have a substantial impact on employee performance. Organizations can incur considerable administrative and operational costs related to employee turnover. Mäkikangas et al. (2021), show how organizations can reduce turnover intentions by reducing needless tasks and demonstrating enlightened leadership. Appreciative leadership strengthens an employee's perception of their role in achieving

organizational goals and evaluating their performance. Because the leader values and recognizes employee contributions, the negative relationship between needless tasks and turnover is mitigated (Mäkikangas et al., 2021). Building business networks through trust and commitment contribute to employee engagement and organizational solvency (Nagpal, 2022). Engaged employees generally perform better due to a better understanding of roles and being valued, and an environment of mutual trust.

The SET is a theoretical explanation of how effective business relationships develop. The SET proposes relationships built on exchanges that benefit each party based on mutually agreed-upon terms (Jeong & Oh, 2017). Employees expect fair treatment and pay as employers expect dependability and honest work. Positive exchange relationships increase employee engagement and performance. According to Hosseini et al. (2022), engaged employees demonstrate higher commitment and motivation, translating to increased productivity. These characteristics are not limited to employee performance. At all levels, individuals who build relationships and networks through trust and commitment are more engaged, perform better, and are less likely to leave an organization (Nagpal, 2022). Successful implementation of strategy requires a top-down approach to development and understanding to create a climate of acceptance and insight (Alon et al., 2018). By developing shared values between all stakeholders, leadership can improve the success of change initiatives within organizations.

Additional contributors to higher work engagement and job performance are realized through the alignment of strategy and shared values. Muhlbacher and Bobel (2019) describe how shared values between stakeholders can improve change initiatives

within organizations. Transformational leadership is a catalyst for employee engagement and performance (Muhlbacher & Bobel, 2019). Leaders who advance a vision of shared corporate values enable the achievement of strategic objectives through clear communication and understanding. To illustrate the importance of employee engagement, Saad et al. (2018) stated that two primary factors contribute to employee engagement: employee personality attributes and communication. Often cited as a leading contributor to employee engagement, leadership style was not a significant contributor to this study. Although the transformational leadership was a moderating factor of employee engagement, the open communication aspect of leadership style was substantial.

Employee personality traits such as proactivity, adaptability, and conscientiousness, decisively correlate to employee engagement. Many factors can influence employee engagement, but ultimately, the responsibilities lie with the employee and leadership (Li et al., 2022). Employees who are resilient and demonstrate a sense of conscientiousness suffer less from illness, are more engaged, and add value to the team and the organization (Kasparkova et al., 2018; Saad et al., 2018). Attributes of transformational leadership, coupled with leader identity entrepreneurship, develop an environment of open communication, belonging, and mutual identity, all of which encourage increased employee engagement and performance (Saad et al., 2018). Strategic alliances are formed for many reasons but primarily to address competitive pressures caused by globalization, rapid advances in technology, and the increasing costs of doing business (Hanaysha et al., 2022). As a mechanism for reducing overhead and personnel

costs, alliances capture innovation through external methods and knowledge, and cost savings through reduced research and development and talent acquisition exist.

By combining strategies that address environmental, social, and economic forms of value, organizations achieve lasting value through economies of scale. Similarly, cost savings occur through better resource management by using sustainable energy methods and materials. This further increase social and environmental value through the responsible use of resources that reduce waste, pollutants, and impact. Corporations face considerable strategic and operational challenges resulting from the rapid expansion of a global economy. Global expansion places significant pressure on organizations to remain competitive and solvent. Personnel and operational needs should be synonymous with strategic development (He et al., 2020). Strategic development is accomplished by following business models that achieve sustainable market value through alliances that make economies of scale, reduce waste, and are socially responsible (Hanaysha et al., 2022). Through corporate governance practice, organizations can tailor their HC to create value and flexibility for all parties involved, and a competitive advantage in social capital investment for future needs (Verma et al., 2022). Moreover, the impact on economic rents over time is positive and sustainable due to the ability to react to market appropriately and operational fluctuations. The concept of monetary costs applies to specific HC applications unique to the functional setting relative to financial and operational theories.



## **Competitive Advantage and SET**

HRM plays a significant role in the achievement of organizational goals and strategy. As one of the organization's most critical assets, employees create a competitive advantage through intrinsic skills (Liu et al., 2021). Employees develop individual attitudes toward HRM and their role in the organizational environment. HR attributions are perceived policies and processes that employees judge positively or negatively (Skelton et al., 2020). Employee turnover poses a significant threat to an organization's competitive advantage due to the cost incurred during the hiring process (Wongsuwan & Na-Nan, 2022). In this study, I analyzed the relevance of HCT in the 21st century. HCT was developed as an economic theory to validate the relationship between an organization's investments in employee skills in its original context. The rationale of the approach is that the investment yielded current and future revenues under the premise that increased knowledge enhances performance. Capital, according to the theory, is the higher-order input that enables the production process. HC is the most relevant input to production because of its heterogeneity, and limited substitutability as the method has evolved.

HC is distinctive to the individual and is difficult to extract and emulate; therefore, it provides a competitive advantage to the possessor and the organization. Additionally, further investment through education and training increases the value of the HC and the likelihood of increased productivity. Likewise, the resource-based view progresses the impact rare and non-substitutable resources have on individual and organization competitive advantage (Beltrán-Martín & Bou-Llusar, 2018).

Goal enhancement should be a continuous process. Organizational leaders who continuously evaluate their strategic goals and processes to ensure they are keeping up with the market and global developments generally remain competitive and experience increased market share (Allahar, 2018). From the purview of HRM as a strategic partner, HR policies and initiatives synchronize organizational goals. Regular audits improve HR functions. In response to globalization and market pressures, organizations that continually evaluate and improve their processes are more resilient, demonstrate increased productivity, and have a more significant competitive advantage (Allahar, 2018). Additionally, HR audits help identify gaps in services and policies that can negatively affect strategic achievements (Navio-Marco et al., 2019). By identifying and mitigating gaps in strategy, HRM ensures that all activities integrate functions to achieve goals, market responsiveness, and sustainability.

Organization specific resources include technology, processes, and knowledge workers. The resource-based view identifies the resources organizations develop and obtain that create a competitive advantage, are challenging to develop, and specific to the organization (Beltrán-Martín & Bou-Llusar, 2018). According to Beltrán-Martín and Bou-Llusar (2018), bundling resources contributes to an organization's competitive advantage. A bundling strategy identifies and combines resources for an optimal outcome to address specific business needs. The dynamic-capability view furthers the resource-based view argument by taking the same bundled resources and capabilities and reconfiguring them to respond to volatility in the operational environment. According to Huang et al. (2018), dynamic capacity sustains competitive advantage through the ability

to deliver effective responses to emotional events. A survey questionnaire revealed which resources or bundles of resources contributed most to an organization's dynamic capability. Key capabilities encompassed *valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN)*. Rare and inimitable capabilities create the most competitive value for the organization that is specific to the organization.

Moving beyond industrial task orientation, the advent of globalization has created a technology-service oriented revolution that revolves around knowledge and knowledge workers. The growth in knowledge work compels organizations to acquire and develop employees capable of making, applying, and disseminating knowledge, often in ambiguous and dynamic environments (Kianto et al., 2019). HRM's must develop HR plans that synchronize evolving technical requirements with knowledge workers capable of developing solutions to current needs devoid of precedence (Akdere & Egan, 2020). Knowledge workers provide a competitive advantage through skills and strategically aligned initiatives that propel an organization into the knowledge age.

Synchronizing HR strategy with organizational strategy contributes to achievement of goals. Considering the prevalence of a diverse and mobile workforce, developmental methodologies should continue to meld strategic alignment between HR and organizational strategy (Allahar, 2018). As the 21st Century moves forward, the impact on HRM encompasses the employment of a talented, diverse workforce is vital to melding all other facets of HRM together to achieve and maintain a strategic partnership (Sagnak et al., 2019). Strategic talent management benefits are significant in a global

economy where rapid change is the norm. The strategic acquisition and enhancement of a workforce is key to long-term sustainability.

### **Transition**

In Section 1, I developed the business problem to explore successful onboarding strategies that reduce turnover and contribute to the employee and the organization's overall success. I reviewed the professional and academic literature to form the business problem, research question, the interview questions used as a primary data source, and the conceptual framework's selection. The topics analyzed in the literature review contributing to employment stability include talent management, core values, corporate brand, and attracting and retaining top talent.

Section 2 focuses on the researcher's responsibility to adhere to the tenets of the *Belmont Report* in protecting the rights and identity of the participants. Furthermore, Section 2 provides a detailed explanation of participant selection and the data collection, organization, and analysis methods to construct the findings. Section 3 is comprised of the study's results, application to professional practice, and the role played in generating social change.

## Section 2: The Project

In this section, I provide a detailed outline of how I conducted the study. I discuss my role and responsibilities as a researcher related to conducting ethical research. I also describe the research method and design that I used to best address the research problem. Additionally, I provide a detailed explanation of participant selection and protections and the methods used to collect and analyze the data. The discussion of methods includes an explanation of the procedures that I used to gather, organize, and process data appropriate for a generic qualitative study.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore the onboarding strategies that HR leaders use to reduce employee turnover. The sample population consisted of six HR leaders who had successfully implemented onboarding strategies used to reduce employee turnover in midwestern light manufacturing companies. The implications for positive social change could include increased employee satisfaction and financial stability that could potentially improve the standards of living in midwestern communities.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The researcher's role in data collection is central to a qualitative study (Mohajan, 2018). The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection in qualitative research (Clark & Veale, 2018). Researchers are responsible for controlling their bias when collecting data through interviews (Bearman, 2019). The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection in a generic qualitative study; therefore, critical steps must

be taken to ensure that the data interpretation and findings reflect what the participants provided (Yin, 2018). Unfounded assumptions are a source of bias caused by ambiguity or misinterpretation; therefore, the researcher must have no personal or professional relationship with the participants or organizations (Skukauskaite et al., 2022).

Researchers mitigate harm and realize their study's full benefits by applying the principles set forth in the *Belmont Report* (Brothers et al., 2019).

In my role as the primary data collector, I treated the participants ethically and with respect. Additionally, I took measures to mitigate potential personal bias concerning my previous roles in leadership and HR policy development and implementation.

According to Johnson et al. (2020), the mitigation of bias begins with selecting the conceptual framework that aligns the study's purpose and research question. By choosing an appropriate conceptual framework, researchers mitigate bias through a thorough review of relevant literature and the use of well-supported concepts and practices (Johnson et al., 2020). Researcher bias is reduced when themes support distinct data sources and validated data (Elliott-Mainwaring, 2021).

I used an audit trail to document and synchronize all study sections to address the research problem. The audit trail is a process of methodically documenting researcher thoughts and actions relative to all critical stages of study completion (Carcary, 2020). Audit trails are a process that researchers use to link data gathering and analysis and conclusions to the original research question to support and validate the study (Liu, 2022). Further, I used the audit trail as a reflective measure to mitigate any biases I may had regarding the subject matter.

Before and throughout a qualitative study process, researcher reflexivity provides multiple opportunities to seek clarification of ambiguities and ensure researcher bias remains separate from the study (Wadams & Park, 2018). Critical reflexivity is an iterative process where researchers reflect on their experiences relative to the study topic and the participants' lived experiences during the interview process (Wadams & Park, 2018). I maintained a reflective journal to document my thoughts and actions throughout the study to mitigate potential biases. I used an interview protocol (see Appendix A) to ensure that I asked each participant the same questions in the same manner to minimize interpretation errors and potential researcher bias. Researchers use interview protocols to strengthen consistency, inform participants of their right to terminate participation at any time, and to assure confidentiality.

### **Participants**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore successful onboarding strategies that HR leaders use to reduce employee turnover. Qualitative researchers rely on participant interviews as a primary source of data; therefore, participant selection must align with the research question and purpose of the study (Blaikie, 2018). Following is an overview of the processes used for identifying and gaining access to qualified candidates for this study.

This study's eligible population was HR leaders who had successfully developed and implemented onboarding programs within a midwestern light manufacturing company to reduce employee turnover. The six HR leaders in the sample were responsible for the implementation of onboarding processes and procedures at their

companies. Participants should be chosen based on their direct knowledge and influence over the study field (Jashari & Kutillovci, 2020). Successful onboarding requires synchronizing organizational strategy, leadership guidance, and HR initiatives (Akdere & Egan, 2020). Therefore, it was essential to recruit participants who had directly engaged with all the onboarding process elements. A clear and accurate knowledge of the business problem further supports the study participants' qualifications (Smith, 2018). Identifying participant commonalities enables a researcher to form a suitable and homogeneous participant pool (Vasileiou et al., 2018).

I gained access to participants through internet searches, reviews of economic census data, and engagement with regional chambers of commerce. I sought out participants who possessed in-depth knowledge relative to their organizational role to increase data saturation and validity. Purposeful sampling involves the identification of participants who meet the criteria for participation and align with the purpose statement and research question (Morales Serazzi et al., 2021). To increase the data's richness, researchers use snowball sampling to take advantage of hidden populations within the organization to obtain supplemental interviews (Dosek, 2021).

Initial contact with the participant was through social media outlets and phone calls. I followed a telephone protocol (see Appendix B) to support consistency when describing my study. Following the initial contact, I emailed additional study information and the consent form to support understanding and transparency. Researchers who demonstrate a thorough understanding of the participants' role within the study convey credibility and transparency and are more likely to gain trust and complete the interview



(Alexander & Smith, 2019). I maintained contact with the participants throughout the process.

### **Research Method and Design**

Researchers use three primary methods in conducting research: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Liu, 2022). Each research method has its merits depending on what the researcher is analyzing and the question to be answered. I used the generic qualitative design to explore the phenomena in question. The in-depth interviews that I conducted yielded a thorough understanding of strategies that lead to successful onboarding that reduces turnover.

### **Research Method**

For this study, I applied the qualitative methodology to evaluate the effectiveness of various strategies used to accomplish successful onboarding. Researchers use the qualitative research method to develop the analysis of spoken words, observations, and documents (Liu, 2022). I provided qualitative evidence to support the type of HR strategy employed by the midwestern light manufacturing industry that may significantly affect the purpose and justification of the entire performance management process. Qualitative researchers explore certain phenomena that quantitative researchers may fail to capture. Researchers use the qualitative approach to answer why and how phenomena occur (e.g., successful strategies to reduce turnover; Scharp & Sanders, 2019). Therefore, I did not choose a statistical methodology to address the research question.

I selected the qualitative method over the quantitative and mixed methods approaches because qualitative findings build upon an exhaustive analysis of spoken

words, observations, and documents. Researchers use the quantitative method to statistically analyze relationships between numerical variables (Dawadi et al., 2021). Questionnaires and surveys are the primary sources of data for quantitative analysis. Once data are gathered, quantitative variables are assigned to evaluate the hypotheses and statistically answer the research question (Bastable et al., 2022). Business researchers use quantitative instruments to explain the intricate steps and processes that leaders employ to achieve successful onboarding strategies (Tobi & Kampen, 2018). The quantitative method was not appropriate for my study.

I did not select the mixed methods approach due to the quantitative component of the method. The mixed methods approach consists of elements of the qualitative and quantitative methods that researchers apply to confirm findings and answer their research questions (Tobi & Kampen, 2018). Researchers use the quantitative element of the mixed methods approach to apply statistical analysis to qualitative findings (Dawadi et al., 2021). Although statistical analysis can demonstrate the success of onboarding strategies through percentages, qualitative examination reveals the story behind the numbers. My study's data sources were semistructured interviews and document reviews; therefore, I obtained rich narratives to answer the research question. The quantitative element of the mixed method was not appropriate for answering this study's research question.

### **Research Design**

The research design for this study was a generic qualitative study. I selected the generic qualitative design to explore the elements of the phenomenon through diverse data sources in an original setting. In a generic qualitative design, specific criteria are

bound to the phenomena to accurately describe participant experiences and knowledge (Nagpal, 2022). The generic qualitative design was appropriate for this onboarding study because it allowed me to draw on the participants' lived experiences and knowledge of the phenomena leaders use to understand HR and personnel needs. Researchers conduct generic qualitative studies to examine a phenomenon through a broad range of opinions, reflections on current events, processes, and lived experiences (Jahja et al., 2021). The benefits of the generic qualitative study design include reliability and generalizability because breadth in understanding phenomena through multiple contexts enhances reliability (Bezyak et al., 2018). Primary sources of data for generic qualitative studies are semistructured interviews, field notes, and researcher observations (Akdere & Egan, 2020). The difference between the generic qualitative study and other qualitative designs lies in purpose and scope.

The case study design was not appropriate for this study. Researchers use the case study to examine a single, bounded phenomenon to address the research question (Yin, 2018). In contrast, researchers use generic qualitative studies to explore the phenomena through numerous in-depth interviews to answer the research question through the eyes of the participant (Britto et al., 2020). A model for most qualitative designs, generalization in a generic qualitative study enhances the transferability of results in different settings with similar effects and increased confidence (Carminati, 2018).

The generic design was the best fit for this study. Generic qualitative studies rely on in-depth interviews as a primary source of data (Jahja et al., 2021). I considered but did not choose the ethnographic design for this study. Researchers focus on discovering

meaning in the lives of groups of people and their cultures when using the ethnographic design (Fusch et al., 2018). Like other qualitative designs, researchers explore the participants' lived experiences through their eyes and natural settings; therefore, the time a researcher spends in the field can be quite significant and limit the use of the ethnographic design (Fusch et al., 2018). To address this study's research question, I chose the generic qualitative study design to capture individual participants' lived experiences through one-on-one interviews.

Phenomenological design was not appropriate for this study. Phenomenology is the study of human behavior based on individual experience and reaction to phenomena that characterize reality (Denney, 2020). As a qualitative approach, researchers seek to understand how the individual experiences a particular situation or phenomenon, therefore, phenomenology involves examining consciousness and the objects of direct experience (Nyumba et al., 2018).

I did not choose the narrative design for this study. Researchers using the narrative method rely on storytelling as a primary data source (Rosiek & Snyder, 2020). Unlike other qualitative methods that depend on semistructured questions to explore the participant's lived experience, the narrative researcher presents the question. The participant tells the story as they see and have lived it (Scheffelaar et al., 2021). Once the participant completes telling the story, the researcher interprets it (Scheffelaar et al., 2021). Data gathering and analysis for a narrative study differ from studies that feature other qualitative techniques because the researcher has an active role during both phases (Rosiek & Snyder, 2020). In contrast, researchers use the generic qualitative study design

to examine characteristic processes and events encountered by the participant (Dvorak et al., 2020).

I obtained data saturation by analyzing multiple sources of material. Data saturation occurs when no new information develops through further data collection (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Semistructured interviews were an essential source of data for this study. According to Blaikie (2018), a key consideration in achieving data saturation is the sample size. The sample size is adequate when no additional insights or codes emerge from further interviews (Saunders et al., 2018; Sebele-Mpofu, 2020). The sample size for data saturation in a generic qualitative study is adequate when it achieves the purpose and objectives of the research (Jahja et al., 2021). For this study, I interviewed six participants to achieve saturation.

### **Ethical Research**

From an ethical standpoint, researchers use the informed consent to explain the study confirm the individual's right to decline or willingness to participate in the study (Zhang et al., 2019). According to Dankar et al. (2019), some study participants have associated informed consent with a rights waiver. Researchers are ethically and legally responsible for ensuring that participants are fully informed and understand their roles and rights (Ferretti et al., 2020). Title 45 of the Code of Federal Regulations provides regulatory enforcement to enact legal liabilities for violations of informed consent (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects and Biomedical and Behavioral Research [NCPHSBBR], 1979). The primary impetus of the code is to

eliminate any potential harm resulting from the study and ensure that informed consent is voluntary and expected outcomes justify the study.

Three primary principles of the *Belmont Report* are beneficence, justice, and respect for persons (NCPHSBBR, 1979). The purpose of the *Belmont Report* is to provide a rigid framework designed to ensure human participant studies are ethical, transparent, and of the participants free will (NCPHSBBR, 1979). The *Belmont Report* requires that participation be fully informed and voluntary, minimizing risks to the fullest extent possible, which resulted in the IRB process (NCPHSBBR, 1979). IRBs protect human subjects of clinical and social research from researcher and institutional biases and unsound research practices (Ferretti et al., 2020). To garner participant trust in the overall process, I provided an overview of the IRB process, the three primary elements of the *Belmont Report*, and a review of a statement of understanding that outlines the study's purpose. I emailed an informed consent memo to all participants for review and signature. An overview of the informed consent provisions demonstrates a commitment to confidentiality to the organization and participant (Salvador & Ikeda, 2018). I collected data after receiving IRB approval (no. 11-09-21-0759711) from Walden University.

As a means of verifying subject participation, I used the consent form to fully inform the study's purpose and the participant's role and ability to withdraw from the study. Researchers and scholars use the consent form to summarize the requirements that participation is voluntary, no harm will result, and minimal risk exists with participation (Brothers et al., 2019). Researchers have an ethical and legal responsibility to ensure that participants are fully informed and understand their role and rights (Adashi et al., 2018).

Title 45 of the Code of Federal Regulations provides regulatory enforcement to enact legal liabilities for violations of informed consent (NCPHSBBR, 1979). Participants are a primary source of data for a qualitative study; therefore, participant selection must align with the purpose of the study, the research question, and the research method and design.

Unlike quantitative studies, qualitative studies rely on one-on-one contact with participants. To ensure trust and transparency in the research process, qualitative researchers have a responsibility to protect all participants' confidence and identity (Mozersky et al., 2020). To protect the participants' identities, I assigned participants pseudonyms after the interview and member checking. I assigned participant pseudonyms; P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6. I stored digital data on a password protected USB stick and deleted all data from my computer. Additionally, I stored the USB stick and all documentation related to the study in a fireproof combination safe in my home for 5 years, at which time I will destroy all data. I have sole access to the safe.

According to Negrin et al. (2022), participants in qualitative studies are most concerned about their privacy and having to travel to a research site. I had mitigations in place to protect participants' identities, and there was no travel requirement for this study. I thanked the participants and offered a summary of the research findings upon completion and a copy of the completed research to illustrate their contribution to the body of knowledge.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

The researcher's role is central to data collection in a qualitative study, given that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection (Mohajan, 2018). I was the

primary instrument for collecting data for the study. I conducted semistructured interviews to collect data and publicly available documents from light manufacturing websites to further enhance the data. Semistructured interviews provide a flexible data collection method that incorporates predetermined and follow-on questions (Bearman, 2019). One of the more significant challenges of one-on-one interviews of the participant emphasizes trust and assurance that their identities are not compromised (Salvador & Ikeda, 2018). I assigned pseudonyms for my participants after the interview and conducted member checking; without the participants' explicit knowledge, they did not know their assigned pseudonym. I used member checking to ensure that my interpretations of the participant responses were accurate and complete. Participants use member checking to correct errors, reflect on their answers, and expand on their responses (Livari, 2018).

Researchers and scholars use the interview protocol to support consistency and reliability through question homogeneity (Yeong et al., 2018). An interview protocol is a procedure or set of instructions that guide the interviewer through the interview process (Roberts, 2020). By following a structured interview protocol (see Appendix A), additional rigor strengthened my study and helped mitigate bias during data collection.

### **Data Collection Technique**

The primary source of data for this study was semistructured interviews. The use of semistructured interviews provide a flexible data collection method that incorporates predetermined and follow-on questions (Bearman, 2019). To mitigate the threat of COVID-19 and geographical constraints, I conducted all interviews by phone. With the



participant's consent, I recorded conversations on my phone and a back-up digital recorder to ensure a complete and accurate recording of the interview. I collected publicly available documents from comparable light manufacturing company websites to support the data collected through semistructured interviews and current literature. Researchers use publicly available documents as an advantage because it does not require consent from the participant to gain access to corporate documents. Additionally, the amount of publicly available documents is extensive due to online material. A key disadvantage of publicly available documents is their reliability and volume. The vast amounts of publicly available documents may need to be more accurate or too voluminous to use (Urbinati et al., 2019). To mitigate publicly available document reliability and scope issues, I selected midwestern light manufacturing companies with an A+ rating by the Better Business Bureau.

Member checking is the final step in the interview process. Member checking provides the participant with the opportunity to review and ensure that responses were correctly captured and to add or omit information (Motulsky, 2021). Interviews are a primary source of data collection for qualitative studies and are susceptible to bias by the researcher and participant (Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022). Member checking is a data validation method that contributes to the study's trustworthiness (Roberts, 2020). The participant can assess the accuracy of the written interpretation of the interviews, identify misperceptions, and make additional corrections or deletions (Hristov & Chirico, 2019). According to Braun and Clarke (2022), participants use member checking to

review researcher interpretations, to confirm their words, make clarifications, and confirm accuracy. I conducted member checking at the end of the interview process.

Participants review their responses to verify accuracy, provide clarification and make additions, or omit the content. Member checking can result in unexpected responses and issues where the participant might become distressed, unwilling to participate further, or exclusion from the study (Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022). Further, member checking allows the participant to review their responses for accuracy and completeness. A primary criticism of member checking is the synthesis of data before the respondent's review. The respondent may not recognize their responses if data is fully synthesized and compiled before examining their spoken words (Motulsky, 2021). Therefore, it is necessary to conduct member checking before full data synthesis to optimize the validation process. Once compiled, the participants had 1 week to review and ensure researcher interpretations of their responses were captured accurately and without bias or enhancements. If there is no response, the assumption was that the researcher's understanding of the interview is accurate, and the data is available for use in the study.

### **Data Organization Technique**

Data management in qualitative research is a process for systematizing, categorizing, and maintaining study documents to make them readily accessible for review and replication (Lin et al., 2020). I used NVivo for data organization and analysis. NVivo is computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) used for thematic analysis and coding in qualitative methods (Feng & Behar-Horenstein, 2019). NVivo has a data transference module that transcribes digitally recorded interviews into

Microsoft Word documents (Elliott-Mainwaring, 2021). An additional benefit of NVivo is the organization and retrieval of data (Maher et al., 2018). Successful data retrieval strengthens dependability and validity by allowing other researchers to easily access the data and repeat a study (Adler, 2022). I used NVivo data analysis software to organize my data, develop themes, and coding.

Qualitative studies generate vast amounts of information from interviews, notes, and document reviews. I used audit trails and reflexivity to record and organize my data collection. Researchers use audit trails to review and document processes applied to build and link data to understand the findings if questions arise (Chong, 2019). Author reflexivity is a method for preserving data collection and integrity during a qualitative study (Wadams & Park, 2018). Researchers use a reflective approach to manage qualitative research data and systematize their data better. Author reflection during data collection and analysis enhances the audit trail's trustworthiness and mirrors the participants' reality (Maher et al., 2018). I documented my reflections in a journal and secured it with the rest of the study's data and documentation. I recorded my audit trail in Microsoft Excel and converted it to a PDF file upon completing the study. I transcribed interviews and created interview summaries for the participants' review. Next, I documented data to Microsoft Word and stored electronic files on a removable password-protected USB stick, and Google drives as a backup. Prior to destroying all data, I maintained all physical and electronic data related to the study in a fireproof combination safe in my home for 5 years.

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis involves systematic processes used to reduce large volumes of data to obtain useful information designed to draw conclusions and answer questions (Mallette & Saldana, 2019). Yin (2018) proposed a 5-step analysis method for researchers to complete data analysis comprised of: (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting, and (e) concluding. The origins of data for this study were semistructured interviews and publicly available documents. I chose thematic analysis to analyze data. Thematic analysis distinguishes themes within the various data sources used to analyze the data (Abdalla et al., 2018). As a method of improving the generic qualitative study's validity, thematic analysis reduces the vast amounts of data collected from multiple sources to consistent themes that support and address the research problem (Elliott-Mainwaring, 2021). Thematic analysis discloses the significant patterns and facts of the examined data (Lester et al., 2020). Researchers mitigate bias through thematic analysis to achieve greater depth in data analysis and corroboration of themes when using multiple data sources (Abdalla et al., 2018). Thematic analysis reduces the risk of diminished study conclusions due to single data source limitations and produces more credible findings (Fusch et al., 2018). To strengthen data saturation, I used thematic analysis to condense data and identify the critical phenomenon that answers the problem and validate the study.

Qualitative data analysis is the process of gathering data from multiple sources and dissecting the data to discover descriptive categories of information that illuminate the phenomena (Mallette & Saldana, 2019). The plan was to organize all data by the six

participants individually. Effective data management from the beginning of collection produces efficiencies in data tracking, access, and auditability (Antonio et al., 2020). Each participant has individual electronic and standard file folders identified by the participant number. Once member checking was complete, I uploaded all documented interviews, notes, and data from my document reviews into NVivo. I used a chunking method to analyze data in manageable segments. Chunking is a data analysis method that reduces large volumes of data into manageable parts employed for thematic development (Roberts et al., 2019). Data segments include participant interviews and publicly available documents, relevant literature, and notes. I selected NVivo data analysis software to organize the data and develop codes and themes. Once themes had been coded and identified, I conducted a thorough analysis of each theme to validate its relationship to the data. I completed the presentation of findings after all themes were verified against the data.

Researchers use NVivo to accomplish thematic analysis and coding through a feature that identifies the most frequently used words in the data (Feng & Behar-Horenstein, 2019). An additional benefit of CAQDAS is the organization and retrievability of data. With NVivo, users classify, sort, and arrange information; examine relationships in the data; and combine analysis with linking, shaping, searching, and modeling (Elliott-Mainwaring, 2021).

I utilized a topical method to organize my literature review. With the topical approach method of literature review, researchers identify specific expressions within the literature that occur throughout data analysis associated with the research question (Lin et

al., 2020). Researchers can use the topical method to classify the correspondence of themes that support how effective onboarding strategies reduce turnover through employee integration (Wongsuwan & Na-Nan, 2022). Researchers link the conceptual framework and research question with current literature to support the study's findings (Malette & Saldana, 2019). I continually compared emerging themes within my literature review and data with effective onboarding processes and SET from current relevant academic publications. Additionally, I continuously reviewed the literature to ensure no new themes develop concerning the conceptual framework and business problem.

### **Reliability and Validity**

A qualitative study's coherence and rigor rely on integrating all research elements toward answering the research question. A thorough review of relevant literature supports the study's coherence, academic rigor, and reliability (Levitt et al., 2021). Factors that demonstrate reliability and validity in qualitative studies are trustworthiness, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Forero et al., 2018).

#### **Reliability**

The dependability of a qualitative study relies on several factors. Qualitative reliability exists when findings are generalizable, replicable, and supported by recognized concepts (Adler, 2022). According to Mohajan (2018), dependability is when findings are generalizable and replicable across similar study fields. Generalizability in qualitative studies occurs when the results support or are supported by existing theoretical constructs that are recognizable and generally accepted (Smith, 2018). Second, a study's coherence

and rigor depend on all study elements' deliberate integration toward answering the research question.

Following data collection, I conducted member checking to strengthen dependability. Member checking supports a framework that aligns with the study's paradigmatic assumptions with participant responses (Skukauskaite et al., 2022). Participants reviewed the researcher's analysis of the interview to confirm the accuracy of their responses and make corrections as needed. Additionally, I enhanced the study's dependability through an interview protocol (see Appendix A) by consistently presenting the study and interview questions to mitigate bias. Thematic analysis distinguishes themes within the various data sources used to analyze the phenomena under review (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Researcher bias is mitigated by further developing multiple themes and their analysis in the data (Abdalla et al., 2018).

### **Validity**

I used member checking to ensure the participants' data was accurate and complete. Researchers use member checking to review the participants responses to their interview summaries for accuracy and completeness (Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022). According to Adler (2022), validity in a qualitative study exists when the researcher demonstrates a deep understanding of the phenomena; findings are truthful, accurate, and conceptually sound. Adler identified the various methods that researchers can use to enhance qualitative studies' validity. Member checking is one of several approaches to strengthen the validity of qualitative research. Through member checking, participants review their response summaries for accuracy and completeness (Taquette &

Borges da Matta Souza, 2022). Member checking is a primary method to strengthen a qualitative study's validity. Member checking and audit trails mitigate bias caused by researcher assumptions and increase the validity of the findings (Maher et al., 2018).

### ***Trustworthiness***

In support of qualitative rigor, comprehensive methods must be in place to validate the results' trustworthiness. Interviews are a primary source of data collection for generic qualitative studies and are subject to researcher and participant bias (Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022). Member checking is a data validation method where the participant can assess the accuracy of the written interpretation of the interviews, identify misperceptions, and make additions, corrections, or deletions (Skukauskaite et al., 2022). Participants ensured my interpretation of their responses was accurate and without bias or enhancements upon their review of the interview summaries.

### ***Transferability***

Researchers use distinct methods to evaluate the legitimacy of a study. Transferability is a method used to strengthen qualitative research (Haven & Van Grootel, 2019). Transferability exists when one study's results apply to similar studies with comparable findings (Forero et al., 2018). I enhanced transferability by clearly defining the participant eligibility and population criteria for context in future studies. Although the author determines applicability, transferability indicates that a study finding is replicable and valid (Johnson et al., 2020). Throughout my study, processes and decision points were documented to demonstrate how the findings could apply to other situations and populations.



### **Confirmability**

Confirmability prevails when the results can be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers. Further, confirmability exists when the process details are specific, coherent, and consistent with the research question and design (Haven & Van Grootel, 2019). According to Scharp and Sanders (2019), researchers strengthen confirmability through detailed records that link data to findings. I achieved confirmability through member checking, author reflexivity, and audit trails.

### **Data Saturation**

I used data saturation to ensure that I adequately addressed the research question. Data saturation exists in a qualitative study when no new themes are identified by collecting additional data and achieving replicability (Yin, 2018). Data saturation supports validity through the continuous examination of data for recurring themes. Themes derived from a wide range of data form a rich network of concepts that address the study's purpose and research question (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I reached data saturation by collecting and analyzing sufficient data to ensure my study supports external validity.

### **Transition and Summary**

In section 2, I provided a detailed outline of how I conducted the study. I supported ethical research by identifying my role as the researcher and mitigations taken to reduce assumptions and personal bias. I discussed my plan for applicant selection and eligibility to support the purpose of the study and address the overarching research question. Finally, I outlined the processes followed to gather, organize, and analyze data

to support proper theme development and coding that occurred, which were appropriate for a generic qualitative study.

In Section 3, I present my findings and demonstrate how this study contributes to the current body of knowledge, professional practice, and implications for future studies. Further, I disclosed how successful onboarding contributed to positive social change, in addition to actions HR leaders can take to implement the findings of this study. Finally, I provide personal reflections on completing this study, followed by concluding statements.

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

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore the onboarding strategies that HR leaders use to reduce employee turnover. The sample population consisted of six HR leaders who had successfully implemented onboarding strategies to reduce employee turnover in midwestern light manufacturing companies. Due to COVID-19 restrictions and geographical constraints, I conducted phone interviews with six HR leaders responsible for developing and implementing their company's onboarding procedures and policies and used publicly available data to support triangulation.

The participants provided information on successful onboarding strategies they had used to reduce employee turnover. All participants indicated that a structured onboarding strategy gave the new hire a sense of belonging and reflected a company that was organized and professional. Additionally, employers with effective onboarding programs demonstrated reduced turnover in their companies. Onboarding strategies with leadership support rooted in the organizational culture emerged as the most successful in reducing employee turnover. Three themes emerged from the participants' responses: (a) develop onboarding strategies, (b) onboard capable talent, and (c) provide leadership support. I begin Section 3 by presenting the findings in more detail. Section 3 also includes discussion of the study's application to professional practice and implications for social change, recommendations for action and further research, reflections, and a conclusion to the study.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

The central research question for this study was, What onboarding strategies do organizational HR leaders develop to reduce employee turnover because of ineffective onboarding strategies in the midwestern light manufacturing industry? To address the research question, I purposefully selected six HR leaders who were responsible for the recruitment and onboarding of new hires and were currently employed with a midwestern manufacturing company. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to safeguard their identity: P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6. I reviewed data from employee manuals, policies, and public websites and used NVivo data analysis software to organize the data and develop codes and themes. Following data collection, I used member checking to ensure that my interpretation of the interview data was accurate. I provided each participant with a summary of the interview for review, additions, or deletions. All participants responded with no additional changes.

I chose SET as the conceptual framework for this study. I used SET as the theoretical lens to establish a relationship between social contracts and the employee's expectations that their positive efforts were recognized and reciprocated. Notably, employees who personally connect with a company during onboarding are less likely to experience turnover intentions within their first few years of employment (Tresna et al., 2019). I used SET to link the findings of this study to the main themes. Most business transactions are a social exchange where HC is an organization's lifeblood (Azeem et al., 2020). Core HR functions such as recruiting and reducing employee turnover are vital onboarding functions. After coding and analyzing all data, I identified three major themes

encompassing factors that contribute to successful onboarding strategies: onboarding strategies, onboard capable talent, and leadership support. Table 1 illustrates the total number of times each theme was mentioned in the participants' interview responses.

**Table 1**

*Frequency of Major Themes in Participant Responses*

Theme	<i>F</i>
Develop onboarding strategies	346
Onboard capable talent	173
Provide leadership support	98

**Theme 1: Develop Onboarding Strategies**

The first theme emerging from the data was that onboarding processes are an effective strategy for reducing turnover. Onboarding activities are a new hire's first operational encounter with a new organization and are the basis for the working relationship. Participants 1 through 6 recognized successful onboarding strategies as an integral component of reducing turnover. Additionally, current literature and data from publicly available documents support the benefits of developing and applying sound onboarding strategies to reduce turnover. P1 stated that in the past, her organization "did not do an excellent job of people understanding the why of what their role is and why they do the things that they do." According to P2,

The rest of the business cannot grow unless we hire enough people; those people have to stick around, so onboarding is huge. We have put a lot of emphasis on making sure people are ready. We want to take that step and make sure that people feel like the process is personalized and that has helped maintain the

people that we did hire. The fact that we have made it more personalized and that we have extended the hiring process has helped us to keep more of these people. Onboarding programs support effective integration of new hires. Participants 4, 5, and 6 indicated that effective onboarding processes support integration, enable new hires to perform their functions, and reduce turnover and employee costs. According to Hosseini et al. (2022), the image of an organization is visible at first contact and fully realized during the onboarding process; therefore, it is essential to foster a positive corporate distinctiveness. Productive onboarding strategies provide a comprehensive impression of what a company offers. P4 stated that their “organization uses an interview system that helps with onboarding and turnover because we ask our candidates questions specific to individual roles.” The first contact with prospective employees is a critical step in selection and retention. Additionally, P5 acknowledged,

You are looking at the whole onboarding process. We work with a lot of connectivity and touchpoints, starting from the first call, connect the call with a person who does the prescreening over the phone, then to the interview process, which if they move forward to the in-person with the managers or supervisors with which they are interviewing. Definitely, our strategic goals are the reduction of turnover.

Leaders use preboarding as a transition into onboarding. New hires receive beneficial information through preboarding before the first day of work, promoting employee engagement and continued interest (Hills, 2022). Effective preboarding is a prologue of the onboarding process that can increase the efficiency of the overall hiring

process. Organizations that implement preboarding processes to support contact and new hire excitement reduce turnover by 20% within the first 45 days of employment (Gopalan, 2022). Leaders use preboarding to provide essential information and processes contributing to successful onboarding.

P3 underscored the value their organization places on onboarding their new hires, stating “we use a multi-factor approach between the HR department and the hiring manager. We provide our new hires with all information they could want to know about the position prior to starting.” Successful onboarding processes reduce turnover by providing direction and the tools needed for employee success (Bell, 2021). In the context of SET, positive social exchanges are essential for successful hiring processes. Positive interactions during hiring and onboarding support workplace integration through feelings of increased commitment and an enduring rapport (Dutta & Mishra, 2021). Leaders use SET to enhance onboarding strategies by underscoring the benefits of mutual reciprocity. During the analysis of the onboarding strategies theme, a remarkable subtheme emerged: organizational connection. The role of connection was a recurring subtheme when discussing the value employees create in the onboarding process.

### ***Organizational Connection***

The first impressions of a company are important. Bell (2021) revealed that initial employee turnover intentions result from poor first impressions when starting a new position. Employee engagement contributes to increased productivity and a sense of belonging and accomplishment (Cohee, 2019). Positive employee attitudes are essential in reducing turnover. For a social exchange relationship to exist, the employee must

develop a strong bond with the organization often established during first contact (Tsachouridi & Nikandrou, 2020). P1 stated, "It is about being able to have people connect, connecting with the organization as a whole. The quicker they feel a part of that, of that organization, the more likely it is that they will adhere to the organization."

Organizational connection and relationship building is an integral part of the onboarding process. Organizational leaders who recognize employees for their value and contribution increases feelings of connection, loyalty, and reliability (Banerjee, 2019). In support, P2 stated,

In our onboarding questionnaire that we send to all of our, our new hires, we ask them things about their, personal life, what kind of things are they are into, are there things we need to know about their learning style that make them feel like they are part of a team.

Mentorship programs link onboarding processes and connections to the organization. P1, P5, and P6 assign mentors when the new hires arrive as part of the onboarding process. The mentor's purpose is to support full integration into the organization and give the new hire a contact with a broad range of experience in the company. According to Rich and Rich (2021), mentoring programs are most effective when processes connect company goals with the new employee's needs. Employee assessments increase the effectiveness of the process.

All participants agreed that onboarding starts with the initial contact of a prospective new hire and establishes the tone for an exchange relationship. Positive connections are the cornerstone of effective HR strategy and implementation (Chong,



2019). Positive social exchanges support a psychological bond that helps reduce turnover by building lasting relationships (Whitham, 2021). By applying SET principles, HR leaders define roles and expectations of the position and employee. Preboarding is where the hiring agent and applicant share information and discuss their mutual expectations of the position and employment action (Jeske & Olson, 2021). As the onboarding process develops, the goal is to ensure that a proper fit exists between parties that function as a catalyst for employment stability (Jeske & Olson, 2021). Social media allow prospective employees to research organizations to determine if a professional fit exists. According to Josan (2020), the experience and training employees gain within an organization are characteristic of the corporate brand and create a competitive advantage. Prospective new hires can determine an organization's credibility through social media; therefore, it is incumbent upon organizations to maintain a positive brand and demonstrate the benefits of employment (Chia et al., 2021). The next theme for discussion is onboarding capable talent.

## **Theme 2: Onboard Capable Talent**

The second theme developed through data collection was onboarding capable talent. The ability of an organization to attract capable talent, apply effective onboarding methods, and reduce turnover is the foundation of a stable workforce (Jeske & Olson, 2021). Attracting capable talent supports successful onboarding by ensuring that an employment candidate is capable of filling a position. P4 stated that reductions in turnover start with their interview process. They have a very in-depth, legally reliable interview system where they pose particular questions to their candidates focused on each

role. Aligning qualifications with roles creates a more seamless onboarding process contributing to reduced turnover. P5 acknowledged that it is increasingly challenging to recruit and retain capable talent. Their hiring practices include attracting new hires with diverse backgrounds interested in upward mobility and longevity with the organization. Skill alignment is one of the most critical factors that increase performance and achieve corporate goals (Datta et al., 2021). Additionally, data retrieved from publicly available documents and light manufacturing websites support maintaining a positive corporate brand. All companies reviewed were rated A+ by the Better Business Bureau and had received industry recognition for their corporate culture and social change initiatives.

HR leaders play a pivotal role in the solvency of their organization. HR leaders devise the means to respond to challenges prompted by globalization and labor transience by implementing dynamic talent management and onboarding practices (Saleh & Atan, 2021). Talent management begins with attracting capable new hires to perform specific functions. All participants emphasized the importance of having cohesive talent management processes that attract capable employees and enable adequate socialization within the corporate culture. Specifically, P2 stated that their biggest challenge was getting enough employees through their process and retaining them. Their hiring strategy was quantity over quality due to operational needs. P2 stated that their onboarding processes had successfully decreased turnover once they focused their hiring policy on more qualified candidates. HR personnel allocate considerable time and resources to finding and hiring candidates with the needed skill sets. Selective hiring enables managers to effectively onboard new hires to gain the most from the employment

investment (Datta et al., 2021). Correspondingly, P3 and P4 have processes to ensure that new hires perform in the position and roles described during the interview process and meet their expectations. The new hire should possess the skills needed to perform the job to achieve successful onboarding. Successful onboarding begins with hiring capable talent. Leaders use onboarding processes that include mentoring programs to help reduce turnover. P1 and P4 have mentoring programs that adapt to the new hire's position. Although the mentor has a broad knowledge of strategic goals, their role as a mentor is specific employee and position. Mentorship programs should focus on talent retention because new hires have less to lose by leaving the organization (Cai et al., 2021). Positive mentoring experiences are conducive to retaining capable talent. Employers accomplish positive social exchanges through effective recruitment and onboarding processes that support proper job fit, employee commitment, and performance (Kumar, 2022). P4 emphasized the positive company image's impact on attracting qualified talent by stating that they reinforce the company's current and future goals and the role of the new hire in achieving those goals throughout the hiring and onboarding process.

Operational leaders who support a positive corporate image are essential for successful employment processes and reductions in turnover. Advertising a positive corporate brand benefits the attraction and retention of highly qualified HC (Josan, 2020). Productive social exchanges reduce turnover and increase the employee's performance and willingness to support the organization (Tsachouridi & Nikandrou, 2020). P5 confirmed the importance of a positive brand stating, "we are a small community and the largest employer in the community with many family members, so we must have a good

brand for ourselves and treat our members the way we need to." Trustworthy corporate brands play a significant role in an organization's credibility and ability to attract and retain talent (Liu et al., 2021). Many organizations with a strong brand reputation understand how negative publicity can impact talent management and strive to appeal as a prospective employer.

Social media exposure can put organizations at risk by exposing a poor public image. By building a solid corporate culture, business leaders develop integrated strategies that define the company and its direction and provide a pathway for workforce achievement (Bell, 2021). According to the principles of SET, leaders who provide clear employee goals and expectations generally experience reduced turnover and develop a solid and committed workforce (Lartey, 2021). All participants acknowledged the importance of a positive corporate image and its impact on recruitment and reducing employee turnover. Additionally, all participants took active measures to create a corporate image that their employees embrace.

Leadership, people, and environmental strategies all help create a strong organizational brand. A positive employer image reinforces a highly qualified labor force and reduces turnover (Azeem et al., 2020). Onboarding capable talent aligns with SET through the strategic alignment and developmental phases of purposeful hiring. Leaders of competitive organizations prioritize retaining the right people through developmental investments and reflect a culture of mutual success (Tsachouridi & Nikandrou, 2020). Successful hiring practices that ensure a new hire fit support the development and reciprocity of relationships. Organizations that cultivate a positive image are supportive

and engage in mutually beneficial arrangements generally realize exceptional commitment and productivity from their employees (Cattermole, 2019). By conducting a 90-day survey, P3 ensures that the hiring strategy achieves all current agreements made during the hiring process. Upholding agreements is relevant to onboarding because the 90-day survey could assess the onboarding process's effectiveness. HR leaders could consider people with the skills and background that correspond to the position and support strategic goals (Ravi-Kumar, 2020). This social exchange supports a trusting environment where perceived and real promises succeed.

### **Theme 3: Provide Leadership Support**

The third theme was leadership support. The role leadership support plays in successful onboarding is paramount to a successful strategy. Reducing employee turnover is critical for the long-term survival of an organization and a key indicator of successful HR strategy (Piasecki, 2020). Employee turnover is often related to turbulence and employee disillusionment due to leadership behaviors or unfair treatment, real or conceived (Banerjee, 2019). Reciprocity is a critical element of SET (Blom et al., 2020). Business leaders who demonstrate innovation and forethought foster an environment that rewards similar employee behaviors (Mansoor et al., 2021). Data retrieved from publicly available documents and websites illustrate the benefits of leadership support for employment and onboarding processes. All companies reviewed provided their key leaders' names, pictures, and business contact information. Additionally, key leaders provided their biographies and personal corporate mission statements. Employees with access to key leaders are more engaged and less likely to leave the organization (Akdere

& Egan, 2020). P1 recounted a previous job experience where they felt engineering managers and production leaders in the facility were not incredibly supportive: “There was not 100% support across the facility. There is an element of maturity or emotional maturity, and you cannot teach. And that was a big element of it as well, that it was just a facility that did not have a great level of emotional maturity among its leaders and a lot of the plant workforce as well.” The purpose of employee onboarding is to introduce the new employee to the functional culture of the organization and socialize them with the new environment (Gopalan, 2022). Leadership support is essential throughout the onboarding process. Operational leaders can undermine the effectiveness of onboarding by actively or passively exhibiting disregard for the process. Influential leaders clearly understand the organization's culture and the capacity to communicate values, provide a learning experience, and facilitate a positive onboarding experience (Hongal & Kinange, 2020). Management participation in mentoring programs demonstrated an interest in the development of the new hire. P3, P5, and P6 mentioned that supervisors and managers were mentors and developed a mentoring program. Leaders provide information and experience to new hires that clarify their role in achieving strategic level goals of the organization (Gisbert-Trejo et al., 2019). Mentorship programs require time and resources; therefore, organizations should consider leadership support. Leaders at all levels play a critical role in a new employee's successful onboarding and socialization.

Organizational support for onboarding is essential. Leadership commitment to onboarding initiatives acknowledges the need for onboarding and develops a strong team concept (Steinhoff, 2021). The participants reinforced the need for leadership support

with onboarding. P1 referred to the limited support received from management when implementing the company's onboarding strategy, stating that the technical and operational leaders needed vacancies filled immediately with little regard for the onboarding process. To effectively integrate new employees, HR leaders require the time and support of leadership to integrate the new hire fully (Dutta & Mishra, 2021). HR leaders emphasize turnover costs to gain management support for the time needed to onboard effectively. P5 provided an insightful example of a core HR responsibility. P5 stated that in a previous position, the organizational leadership only participated in onboarding once they realized the cost of \$15,000 per employee. Leadership support is essential because it is more cost-effective to retain a new hire versus losing productivity, customer service, and time (Peltokorpi et al., 2022).

Employee turnover can be costly to a company. HR managers must ensure that leaders at all levels understand employee turnover's financial and strategic impact on an organization (Hassler, 2020). P3 used a multi-factor approach between the HR department and the hiring manager on the ground:

We provide our new hires with every bit of information possible that they could want to know about the position prior to starting. We typically hand them over for true onboarding within their role with their facility manager or local manager. The onboarding is position specific and managed right at the manager level.

Leaders who support comprehensive onboarding strategies experience increased productivity and reduced labor costs, leading to increased market share (Hills, 2022). According to P3, leadership involvement cultivates an immediate connection between

the new hire, the manager, and the company. Position-specific onboarding, combined with HR and leadership principles, provide a new hire with a greater breadth of knowledge and a sense of belonging (Bell, 2021). Employees reciprocate when the organization meets their exchange commitments and considers their well-being, increasing trust and attaining organizational goals (Dutta & Mishra, 2021). Employees are less likely to leave an organization that functions in their best interest and where leadership is capable and valued.

Scholars use SET to link leadership support and employee onboarding. Operational leaders play a significant role in providing a safe and supportive work environment and are responsible for developing and executing strategies (Cattermole, 2019). Some employees fulfill expectations through social exchanges with leadership teams. Social exchange relationships and emotional commitments exist when management provides the tools and environment needed to perform tasks while the employees reciprocate through strategic goal achievement (Lartey, 2021). All six participants recounted experiencing positive onboarding outcomes and reductions in turnover when leadership participated in the onboarding process. According to Bos Nehles and Meijerink (2018), leaders at every level represent the organizational culture, reflected by how well they work together. A climate of collaborative leadership is indicative of a positive work environment. Employees perceive that organizational leadership has their best interest in mind when supportive relationships exist at higher levels (Bos Nehles & Meijerink, 2018). Further, employees who perceive strong leadership cooperation may reciprocate by displaying similar attitudes and behaviors



(Piasecki, 2020). Work environments with a culture of cooperation are likely to be more productive and benefit from reduced turnover.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

The findings of this study support professional HR practices by connecting contemporary literature to realistic examples of effective onboarding strategies that reduce turnover. The unemployment rate in the United States is under 4%, which indicates that the viable talent pool is just about exhausted (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.). Additionally, global demographic shifts and birth rate declines lead to talent gaps and shortages (Piasecki, 2020). Reducing turnover is an effective way for organizations to maintain a stable workforce, reduce personnel costs, and remain viable in competitive global markets. Attracting capable talent and socializing them to the corporate culture begins with onboarding processes that align new hires with strategic goals and the operational environment.

All participants agreed that effective onboarding processes reduced turnover and had successful programs in place to increase retention. Onboarding strategies are important because they represent a socialization process that clarifies roles and the company's culture and values (Bhakta & Medina, 2021). The participants of this study revealed that a strategic onboarding plan is a factor in ensuring that recently hired talent is integrated, productive, and willing to remain with the company. HR professionals who provide well-planned and comprehensive onboarding events experience less turnover, higher job satisfaction, and increased productivity (Kirchner & Stull, 2021). The

influence of social exchange and the quality of interactions underscore the importance of relationships in the socialization process (Ferm & Thaichon, 2021).

Effective onboarding serves the purpose of building a connection between the new hire and the organization. Employees develop a connection resulting from socialization processes that should begin at first contact. A thoroughly socialized employee links their expected employment gains to the company's norms, values, and goals (Peltokorpi et al., 2022). Establishing an early employee-organization connection contributes to successful onboarding and reduces turnover. Management is essential in successful onboarding (Jeske & Olson, 2021). New hires gain a sense of the corporate culture through contact with their management.

Business leaders with a broad knowledge of operational requirements positively contribute to employee onboarding, ensuring a person-organization fit, increasing job satisfaction, and reducing employee turnover (Skelton et al., 2020). Therefore, leadership support and participation at all levels plays a role in the employment and onboarding processes. Onboarding is a collaborative process that can last from days to several months; therefore, employers should maintain constant contact with new hires from the time they accept an offer and beyond the onboarding process (Peltokorpi et al., 2022). Onboarding processes that are flexible and account for the different learning styles of new hires and their positional needs contribute to better socialization and reductions in turnover.

The study participants disclosed that employees have more career choices, greater control over how and where they work, and the potential to negotiate higher

compensation packages. Organizational leaders reduce turnover and develop a committed workforce by making new employees immediately feel like team members during onboarding.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The social impact of employment stability is significant to individuals, organizations, and communities. Onboarding strategies contribute to a stable workforce and economy by building an immediate and lasting connection between employees and companies (Cattermole, 2019). Leaders who use effective onboarding facilitate processes that support a proper employee-position fit (Carlos & Muralles, 2022). According to Hills (2022), new hires with positive onboarding experiences demonstrate increased engagement, organizational commitment, and express fewer turnover intentions. Stable employment contributes to the overall well-being of individuals and their communities (Pacitti, 2021). Ineffective or nonexistent onboarding processes can result in high turnover, potentially lowering employee morale and levels of employee engagement (Jabutay & Rungruang, 2020). Disengaged employees are more likely to experience turnover intentions, which have cascading effects on all employees and working environments (Li et al., 2022). High employee turnover has more significant social consequences than market share; it profoundly affects the individual's quality of life (De Smet et al., 2021). Pervasive employee turnover results in periods of unemployment that harm an individual's emotional and financial well-being and can negatively characterize an individual as unemployable (Amiri, 2021). Positive onboarding experiences reduce turnover and contribute to employment stability.

The findings of this study emphasize the importance of an effective onboarding strategy. Successful onboarding contributes to decreased employee turnover, long-term loyalty and commitment, and better living standards (Hassler, 2020). Participant data highlighted the importance of low turnover and stable employment. For example, P5 noted their organization is the largest employer in a small community; therefore, they maintain a positive community image by reducing turnover through sound onboarding strategies. Organizations with limited turnover support sustained employment levels within a community. Reduced employee turnover can reduce mental health issues and criminal activity (Virgolino et al., 2022). Periods of unemployment, regardless of duration, can create the potential for harmful economic outcomes; therefore, companies that maintain steady workforces contribute to a higher standard of living for employees and their communities (Pacitti, 2021). Reduced turnover through effective onboarding could support positive economic and social outcomes.

### **Recommendations for Action**

In this study, I focused on onboarding strategies HR leaders use to reduce employee turnover. The participants estimated that the cost of turnover per employee was about \$15,000. High turnover rates result in substantial costs, which increase with employee tenure. When companies lose employees with extensive time with the organization, they lose the expertise that employees possess. Employee turnover can create a significant talent gap and stress on remaining employees, causing major setbacks in operations (Pacitti, 2021). A discussion of the conclusions and steps for practical

actions follows. Three steps for practical actions arise from the conclusions: develop an onboarding plan, internal talent development, and a mentorship program.

### **Development of an Onboarding Plan**

A well-designed onboarding plan supports alignment between prospective new hires, the position, and the organization's culture. Organizations often confuse orientation with onboarding, a small segment of a complete onboarding process (Bhakta & Medina, 2021). Onboarding begins with the first contact making an offer and well beyond the new-hires first few weeks or months of employment (Shufutinsky & Cox, 2019). Some HR leaders use structured onboarding plans to combine all aspects of orientation, training, and socialization to clarify the environmental and cultural norms of the company (Bhakta & Medina, 2021). A multifaceted onboarding plan reinforces employee socialization and connection with the organization and supports reduced (Jabutay & Rungruang, 2020).

### **Internal Talent Development**

Organizations should have a plan to identify future talent early in a new employee's tenure. During onboarding, one of the earliest steps to develop potential talent within a company is to assess employees thoroughly for future grooming by closely observing behaviors, strengths, and weaknesses (Shufutinsky & Cox, 2019). Onboarding processes that reveal growth potential influence new hire performance and stability (Hills, 2022). Cultivating career paths that align individual strengths and interests with business needs develops talent to the fullest potential (Umans et al., 2021). Identifying future talent during onboarding provides employers with a systematic method of

recognizing future leaders based on skill sets and specific criteria (Jooss et al., 2019).

Employees who see future growth opportunities with a company are less likely to experience turnover intentions and are more productive.

### **Mentorship Programs**

Mentoring programs contribute to successful onboarding by providing existing employees with a meaningful avenue of interaction with new hires. Mentoring serves a dual purpose in developing talent and reducing turnover by allowing existing employees to demonstrate their expertise and knowledge of the company (Deng et al., 2022).

Mentorship programs demonstrate leader support for new and existing employees through leader involvement in the onboarding and mentoring process. Mentorship programs allow management to identify future talent for advancements and leadership roles (Rich & Rich, 2021). For the new employee, mentors offer a working overview of the culture. Formal or informal mentoring programs work best when a positive match between the mentor and the mentee exists (Cai et al., 2021). Turnover in organizations can cost employers millions of dollars annually in replacement costs. Mentorship programs prove to reduce turnover intentions by demonstrating a genuine interest in the employee and a willingness to invest limited time and resources in their development (Deng et al., 2022). Therefore, mentees must access their mentors and build relationships at various organizational levels.

Transparent processes and communication provide constructive and essential interactions with existing employees during the onboarding process (Shufutinsky & Cox, 2019). Onboarding is an opportunity to highlight the benefits of working for a company

and reinforce the new hire's decision (Umans et al., 2021). Onboarding is not a universal process that aligns the newcomer with the organization, but a process designed to develop a lasting relationship between the new hire and the organization.

The results of this study are relevant for all organizational stakeholders because they reveal how effective implementation of onboarding processes reduces employee turnover. While I focused on midwestern light manufacturing, the findings could be helpful to leaders across all sectors seeking strategies to reduce employee turnover. The study is available for publication in the ProQuest dissertation database journals, and I participated as a poster presenter with Walden University. I provided all participants with a summary of the findings and will provide a link to the final study when published.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

In this generic qualitative study, I explored the onboarding strategies that organizational HR leaders use to reduce employee turnover. I conducted semistructured interviews with six participants as the primary data source and reviewed publicly available documents from suitable midwestern light manufacturing companies. The results of this study are relevant to HR and corporate leaders because it provides compelling outcomes informed by effective onboarding methods. The shortcomings of this study provide researchers with opportunities for further research.

I limited my study to six participants from midwestern light manufacturing companies covering my regional proximity, prevailing industries, and employment background. The purpose of this study was to determine how effective onboarding reduces turnover. Therefore, future researchers could reproduce this study in different

business sectors and geographical locations, benefit from the findings, and advance the operational and academic body of knowledge. Additionally, a researcher could increase the size and diversity of the participant pool and include focus groups and document reviews in future qualitative studies to achieve data saturation and increase the scope of the study (Chun Tie et al., 2019). The qualitative researcher benefits from studying effective onboarding's influence on reducing employee turnover.

Finally, I recommend the quantitative design for future studies. Researchers apply statistical analysis to determine how viewpoints and variables impact a phenomenon (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Additionally, researchers could use descriptive statistics to examine the relationship between onboarding and other variables contributing to employee turnover, such as leadership style, job satisfaction, and organizational culture (Fischer, 2021). A robust sample garnered through surveys and interviews provides a greater understanding and generalizability of findings. Future researchers conducting studies with larger populations and mixed method designs may provide leaders with new insights that could help reduce employee turnover.

### **Reflections**

I have always felt that much of what we do should be more significant than ourselves, and what better way to contribute than to expand my possibilities by earning a DBA degree. I look forward to the opportunities earning a doctoral degree can provide me as a scholar and practitioner. Completing this program has been one of the most challenging ventures ever. Throughout this process, I felt like I was on an emotional rollercoaster where every success met with two frustrations. Gratefully, I had the



guidance of my chair, committee, and the unwavering support of my family and friends. Looking back, I cannot believe the sheer amount of time this process took to complete, and the time taken from my family life.

I chose the study of onboarding processes and HR practices due to my work experiences and interest. I have accepted employment in my professional career, where the first day left me regretful that I took the position. With these experiences in mind, I made sure through self-reflection, close adherence to IRB stipulations, and my interview protocol that I mitigated preconceived notions of what my participants should tell me. One of the biggest challenges of completing this study was recruiting research participants following the COVID-19 restrictions. Company leaders were recovering from operational pauses and high turnover. I understood the challenges organizations were facing but was surprised that the HR leaders were unwilling to benefit from participation. With minor changes to my study, I recruited enough participants to complete data collection and analysis.

I am elated to complete this doctoral program; I will use my experience and this accomplishment to better myself, my family, and my community. The social change element of this program goes beyond expanding individual and corporate wealth; therefore, the best interests of all stakeholders should be a consideration during periods of change and process improvement. Completing this program has been a fantastic experience, and I am glad it is over.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative generic study was to explore strategies HR leaders used to implement effective onboarding programs that reduce employee turnover. The six participants were HR leaders from six different midwestern states who shared the onboarding approaches they used to reduce turnover in their organizations. During data analysis, I identified three primary themes that addressed the research question and aligned with current literature on employee turnover: (a) develop onboarding strategies, (b) onboard capable talent, and (c) leadership support. The study findings and literature review suggested that successful onboarding plans reduce employee turnover.

The lack of effective onboarding programs can cost organizations as much as \$11 billion annually in lost HC investment and productivity (Deng et al., 2022). HR leaders who plan and develop strong onboarding processes effectively decrease employee turnover. According to Badshah and Bulut (2020), 70% of employees are more likely to stay with a company beyond 3 years if they experience positive onboarding processes. One recommendation for designing effective onboarding programs is to include participation from key stakeholders with technical expertise that can contribute to the onboarding process that supports proficiency and effectiveness. Another effective approach to onboarding is to assign new hire mentors to orient the employee to the new environment to support enculturation.

The strategies and themes within this study could provide HR leaders with new onboarding strategies to reduce turnover. Onboarding programs' impact on the reduction in turnover has limited evidence in the literature. However, the general principles

underlying onboarding programs are consistent with research on socialization, which reduces turnover and increases talent retention. Although I address onboarding processes that contribute to stability in the workforce, I observed that the social implications of onboarding extend beyond the profitability of an organization. The individual turnover costs are lost wages, breaks in employment, and the threat of financial damage.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

<b>Interview Protocol</b>	
<b>What you will do</b>	<b>What you will say-script</b>
Introduce the interview and set the stage—often over a meal or coffee	<p>I introduced myself as a doctoral candidate followed by:</p> <p><i>I cannot thank you enough for taking the time out of your busy schedule to participate in this interview process. As we discussed over the phone and through correspondence, I am conducting a study on successful onboarding strategies. The interview is one of the most important elements of a qualitative study and is intended to garner your independent accounts and personal experiences related to the implementation of successful onboarding strategies. The intent of the interview questions for this study are to discover the origins of your organizations strategic successes and the processes used. Just as a reminder I will be recording the interview process to ensure a complete and accurate transcription. If you do not have any further questions, I will begin the interview.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watch for non-verbal queues</li> <li>• Paraphrase as needed</li> <li>• Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in-depth</li> </ul>	1. What onboarding strategies do you use to reduce employee turnover?
	2. What role does onboarding play in achieving strategic goals?
	3. What elements of your onboarding program are the most successful in reducing employee turnover?
	4. What elements of your onboarding program are the least successful in reducing employee turnover?
	5. How do you determine if the onboarding strategy is successful in reducing employee turnover?
	6. What challenges have you faced in implementing an onboarding strategy to reduce employee turnover?
	7. What additional information would you like to share about the onboarding strategies you used to reduce employee turnover?
Wrap up interview thanking participant	<i>This concludes the interview process; do you have any other questions at this time?</i>

	<p><i>Again, I appreciate your time and contribution toward the completion of this study.</i></p> <p><i>A final step in the interviewing process is to conduct a follow-up session called "member checking." This is where you review a synthesis of your transcribed responses to my questions. This gives you the opportunity to ensure that I correctly captured your responses and for you to add or omit information from your responses.</i></p>
Follow-up member checking procedure	<p><i>I will conduct member checking to confirm that responses were correctly captured and add, change, or omit information. I will provide my interpretation of the interview by email. You have one week to review and ensure researcher interpretations of their responses were captured accurately and without bias or enhancements. At the end of the one I will send you a follow-up email to validate my interpretation of your responses, answer any additional questions, and finalize the interview process. If there is no response within three days of sending the email, I will follow-up with a phone call to answer any questions you may have regarding the interview result and process. This conversation should take no longer than 30-45 minutes.</i></p>

## Appendix B: Telephone Protocol

*Greeting of the day [Name]:*

*My name is Mark Carpenter, and I am a doctoral student with Walden University pursuing a Doctor of Business Administration degree. I am researching successful onboarding strategies leaders use to reduce employee turnover, entitled: "Effective Onboarding Strategies to Increase Talent Retention."*

*I am requesting one-on-one interviews with HR leaders who have experience in successfully implementing onboarding programs. If you provide me with your email address, I can send you additional details of the study.*

*I appreciate your consideration of this request and believe that your organization would benefit from participation in this study.*

Document representatives' response.

*Again, thank you for your time and consideration.*