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Retention Strategies to Retain Retail Employees

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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2024

Abstract

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MA, Ashford University, 2017

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfilment

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Abstract

Retail organizations with high employee attrition rates may lack continuity and institutional knowledge for long-term sustainability. Business leaders, human resource managers, and retail managers must implement successful retention strategies to ensure sustained growth. Grounded in Herzberg's two-factor theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore strategies that managers of retail organizations use to increase the retention of retail employees. The participants consisted of managers of three retail organizations in Michigan who implemented strategies to increase the retention of retail employees. Data were collected from literature reviews, interviews of participants, and documentation. Data were analyzed using Yin's five-phase process, and three themes emerged: COVID-19's impact on employee retention, effective human resource management structure, and adaptive leadership. A key recommendation for leaders and managers in retail organizations is to create employee retention strategies, including three phases: (a) investigative efforts, (b) creation and implementation of successful employee retention strategies, and (c) evaluation, adjustment, and continuous improvement. The implications for positive social change include the potential to enhance employee retention and increase tax revenue for federal and local agencies. The more taxes local and national agencies receive, the more services and assistance they can render to the population.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my grandmother, Ann.

Acknowledgments

I want to acknowledge all those who have supported me along this journey and allowed me to reach for my dreams.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Retail organizations serve multiple sets of customers in markets around the world. While the retail industry produces billions of dollars in revenue worldwide, no organization can completely avoid low employee retention rates. Managers of retail organizations may benefit from this research into successful employee retention strategies.

Background of the Problem

The world recently experienced a virus pandemic. The novel virus, SARS-CoV-2 or COVID-19 belongs to the family coronavirus (Dhakal et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the U.S. labor market, with initial unemployment insurance claims reaching over 250,000 by March 2020 (Bartik et al., 2020). Particularly, the employee turnover rate in the retail industry is very high, at 35% (Madhani, 2020). Thus, the primary concern for retail organizations is human resource practices and employee satisfaction (Sinha et al., 2018). Given the size of the retail industry, there may be a need to gain insights into successful employee retention strategies. The understanding gained from researching retail employee retention may reduce attrition rates and improve retention rates. Insights provided on successful employee retention strategies in this qualitative multiple case study may benefit leaders of retail organizations in the future.

Problem and Purpose

Globally, the retail industry records high employee turnover (Ferreira & Potgieter, 2018). In September 2021, retail trade employment was 202,000 lower than in February 2020 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). The general business problem is that some leaders of retail organizations may not understand how to manage the increasingly high employee attrition rate. The specific business problem is that some managers of retail organizations lack successful strategies for increasing the retention of retail employees.

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore successful strategies that managers of retail organizations use to increase the retention of retail employees. The targeted population consisted of managers of three retail organizations in Michigan who successfully implemented strategies to increase retention of retail employees. Successful employee retention helps to avoid recruitment costs (Ketprapakorn & Kantabutra, 2019). Implications for social change are that businesses could improve employee retention rates and avoid recruitment costs. The self-dignity and professionalism of managers of retail organizations may improve due to their ability to increase retail employees' retention. Society may benefit from the reduction in unemployment consequent upon the increased retention of retail employees.

Nature of the Study

The three major approaches to research are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Saunders et al., 2016). Correspondingly, researchers may choose to use quantitative or qualitative methods, or both (Saunders et al., 2016). The qualitative method is relevant for exploring and understanding real-life experiences, while quantitative researchers adopt treatments, quantify relationships or group differences among predefined variables (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). Having the intent to explore real-life experiences of managers with successful employee retention strategies, I decided that the qualitative method was the best choice. In the most basic terms, quantitative research methods are concerned with collecting and analyzing structured data from accurate and reliable measurements represented numerically to allow for statistical analysis (Goertzen, 2017). Given the focus on producing findings from numerical data, the quantitative method did not align with the purpose of this study. A mixed-method approach consists of the combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches to assess the magnitude of a problem, explore meanings, and gain an understanding of those occurrences (Kaur, 2016). With no intention to carry out treatments, experiments, or analysis of numeric data concurrently with a qualitative approach, mixed methods were inappropriate for exploring the business problems of this study. Therefore, I used the qualitative method for this study.

Qualitative research designs explored for this study include (a) phenomenology, (b) ethnography, and (c) case study. A research design is a way a research question and objectives become operationalized into a research project (Saunders et al., 2016). Phenomenology is a design for researching how individuals or groups perceive lived experiences of a given phenomenon (McAlpine, 2016). I chose not to use phenomenology because the purpose of this study was not to understand the perception of groups of people. With ethnography, the design enables researching and observing group culture and practices of people (Walz et al., 2016). I did not use the ethnography design because the purpose of conducting the study was not to examine potential participants' cultures. A case study design is relevant to exploring a phenomenon in real-world settings (Pihlajamaa et al., 2019). Adopting a multiple case study design strengthens conclusions from cross-cases compared to a single case study (Ridder, 2017; Yin, 2018). Given that the purpose of this study was not to research people's perceptions or lived experiences of a phenomenon or understand group culture and practices, I chose the multiple case study design.

Research Question

What successful strategies do managers of retail organizations use to increase the retention rate of retail employees?

Interview Questions

1. What Covid-19 related challenges did your organization face when trying to increase the retention rate of retail employees?
2. What other non-Covid-19 related challenges did your organization face regarding increasing the retention rates of retail personnel?
3. How did your organization overcome any challenges presented in implementing employee retention strategies?
4. What employee retention strategies implemented by your organization have increased the retention of retail employees?
5. How did your organization implement successful employee retention strategies for retail employees?
6. What key barriers did you encounter while implementing employee retention strategies to retain retail employees?
7. What strategies are in place to identify reasons why some retail employees leave the company?
8. What employee retention strategies have you implemented that have failed to improve retail employees’ retention rates?

9. What additional information can you share regarding strategies used to increase the retention rate of retail employees?

Conceptual Framework

I used Herzberg's two-factor theory to understand the strategies of managers who successfully increased the retention rate of retail employees. Herzberg et al. (1959) introduced the two-factor theory by explaining that motivation and hygiene are two types of motivational factors. Herzberg et al. claimed that these two factors triggered employees' satisfaction or dissatisfaction respectively. Therefore, I used the two-factor theory as the conceptual framework for exploring the high turnover of retail professionals.

Operational Definitions

Benchmarking: Benchmarking is a systematic process for identifying and implementing the best or better practices used by highly successful organizations (Jankovic & Vlasic, 2019).

Employee attrition: Employee attrition is a workforce diminution consequent to employees leaving a company (Speer et al., 2019).

Emotional intelligence: Emotional intelligence is an individual's ability to apply emotions to manage interactions or relationships with others and achieve desired results (Palmer, 2019).

Employee retention strategies: Employee retention strategies refer to the plans, means, and a set of decision-making behavior formulated by organizations to retain a competent workforce for performance (Bidisha & Mukulesh, 2013).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Researchers make assumptions when exploring a phenomenon. Assumptions are the reasonings or notions of a researcher during an inquiry (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). One of the assumptions made for this study was that respondents would answer questions truthfully. Another assumption was that the number of research participants would be enough to meet data saturation.

Limitations

Limitations are weaknesses or potential weaknesses of the research beyond the researcher's control (Malterud et al., 2016). A limitation to this study was the limited time to complete the research. The other limitation was the small pool of participant, so the research findings may not be generalizable to other populations.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the restrictions built into the study by researchers to establish the scope of the project (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The delimitations of this study include the research area, population, and sample size. I carried out this study in the United States. Participants of this study were managers of retail organizations who adopted successful strategies for increasing the retention rate of retail employees. Another delimitation was that the participants were from only three organizations.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

The contribution to business practice is that the findings of this study could be valuable for crafting organizational policies that improve employee retention strategies. By improving employee retention rates in the retail industry, findings could contribute to the active practice of business. The costs of employee retention strategies include recruitment and selection of new staff, compensation for extra work done through overtime payments, and training and development (Aliyu & Nyadzayo, 2018). Increasing employee retention rates may reduce recruitment, training, and replacement costs associated with employee turnover. Consequently, there might be an increase in the overall value of the organization's workforce. Retained employees may have additional opportunities to create value for the business through their experience and professional development. Results from the research may benefit managers, especially those in the HR department of retail companies who lack successful strategies to improve the retention rate of retail professionals. There may be a concurrent improvement in organizational performance and profitability.

Implications for Social Change

An implication for social change from the findings of this study is informing organizations about successful retention strategies. Society may benefit from improved service and information provided by retail organizations. Retained employees may not face the negative experiences of unemployment. Thus, employees may increase their financial capacity to contribute to society with resultant positive social change. Particularly, employed individuals generate taxable income and tax revenue for the community that may support local economies.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The business phenomenon of low employee retention in the retail industry presented as a researchable subject. Reasons for low employee retention include compensation, work–life balance, differing needs for different ages, and the relevance of the digital and social labor market. Employee retention is a challenge for organizations (Hejase et al., 2016). This study contributes to an existing pool of knowledge on successful strategies for increasing the retention of employees in retail organizations.

Organization of the Review

The organization of this literature review includes content under five subheadings, a conclusion, and a transition to Section 2. Discussions under the five subheadings relate to employee retention, Herzberg's two-factor theory, common themes found during literature search, retail organizations, human resource management, employee retention in the digital age, and digital retail service acceptance due to Covid-19 and the effect on employee retention. The use of multiple sources in the review was to enhance the overall quality and reliability of the study.

Literature Search Strategy

For the literature review, I explored peer-reviewed articles retrieved from journals and seminal sources, books, and government websites regarding the conceptual framework of Herzberg's two-factor theory. Databases such as Pro Quest Central, EBSCO, and Google Scholar were relevant in accessing materials on strategies employed by managers to enhance employee retention in the retail industry. I used some of the following search terms: *employee retention, retail organizations, human resources* *manager, retail employees, compensation, case study, job satisfaction, job dissatisfaction, qualitative, attrition, benchmarking, e-commerce, retail retention,* and *vendors.* There are 235 references in this study, with 219 (93.2%) peer-reviewed sources. In the literature review, there are 106 sources: 91 (92.4%) peer-reviewed materials and 86 (87%) having publication dates no later than 5 years from December 2021.

The Phenomenon of Employee Retention and Turnover

Business leaders make decisions critical to the profitability and survival of the organization. Highly skilled employees (talents) need the platform of an organization to achieve personal success as much as business entities require a quality workforce for sustainability. While the employees continue to contribute to corporate objectives, the organization reciprocates by investing in developing talents (Shet, 2020). At a point, however, employees may develop turnover intentions. Turnover intention is an employee's tendency to leave an organization within a given period (Yang et al., 2019). Employee turnover is inevitable regardless of the company, industry, or sector (An, 2019). However, business leaders are responsible for crafting strategies to influence employees' long-term service (Shahvazian et al., 2016). Although hiring knowledgeable employees is essential for an employer, employee retention strategies are also critical (Baharin & Wan Hanafi, 2018). Non-responsiveness to a high employee turnover may result in the lack of qualified and experienced hands needed by an organization for its sustainability.

A general assumption about employee turnover intentions stems from job dissatisfaction and other issues not peculiar to whether employees experience satisfaction

(Al-Mamun & Hasan, 2017; Yang et al., 2019). Hence, distinguishing the types of employee turnover intention and isolating those targeted strategies may enhance employee retention rates. Two broad categories of employee turnover are voluntary and involuntary (Al-Mamun & Hasan, 2017; Rubenstein et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2019). Voluntary turnover occurs when an employee decides to quit or exit the organization, while in the case of involuntary turnover, the employer terminates the worker (Al-Mamun & Hasan, 2017; Rubenstein et al., 2018). A better employment offer, lack of job satisfaction, superior-subordinate conflicts, and personal or domestic issues can all stimulate voluntary turnover (Al-Mamun & Hasan, 2017). The lack of strong community ties may also contribute to the prevalence of voluntary turnover (Rubenstein et al., 2018). In contrast, involuntary turnover arises from dismissal, retirement, redundancy, or employee death (Al-Mamun & Hasan, 2017; Oruh et al., 2020). When the organization does not provoke the loss of human resources, it becomes essential to identify the reasons for turnover (Ramalho Luz et al., 2018). The research focus in this study was on strategies for controlling voluntary turnover to achieve improved employee retention in the retail industry.

An employee's ability to self-terminate their employment may contribute to management's ability to manage employee retention rates by making decisions that address identified reasons employees desire to leave. Businesses experience a loss of human and social capital when employees exit the organizations. The resulting adverse outcome of employee turnover is the loss of individual skills, experience, and intelligence (Yang et al., 2019). Desired organizational results may profoundly impact a company's direct and indirect costs. Direct costs include identifying, selecting, recruiting, and training new employees (Al-Mamun & Hasan, 2017). Organizations may incur costs on the recruitment process such as the phone calls to a prospective candidate, the testing, shortlisting, and the final selection. There is also a cost to internal resources deployed through the recruitment process. On the other hand, indirect costs related to investments for the existing workforce can be beneficial (Al-Mamun & Hasan, 2017). Retaining experienced employees compared to engaging new employees may reduce training. Training a new employee costs more than retaining an existing employee (Ganapathy, 2018). Employee retention thus becomes more attractive to organizations. Turnover costs the U.S. economy an estimated $5 trillion annually, reduces earnings and stock prices by an average of 38%, but retention reduces turnover costs, increases productivity, customer loyalty, and profitability (Bake, 2019). Therefore, leaders must identify measures that encourage employees to stay with the organization and have top talents retained for a maximum period.

Herzberg Two-Factor Theory

Herzberg et al. (1959) introduced the two-factor theory, otherwise known as the motivation-hygiene theory. Understanding the two-factor theory may allow for successful employee retention strategies to find solutions to high employee turnover. The satisfaction of individuals stems from work-related activities, while work conditions make people unhappy or dissatisfied (Herzberg et al., 1959). According to Herzberg, satisfaction and dissatisfaction do not exist on the same continuum. However, there is either satisfaction or the lack of satisfaction and dissatisfaction or the lack of dissatisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). There were either work characteristics that culminate in the satisfaction or the lack of it or other job factors that result in dissatisfaction or its prevention (Herzberg et al., 1959). The elimination of causes of dissatisfaction may not necessarily result in satisfaction nor increase factors of satisfaction.

The two factors of the theory related to satisfaction and dissatisfaction are motivation and hygiene (Herzberg et al., 1959). Hygiene factors are job-related physiological concerns that motivate employees at the workplace, which, if non-existent, can cause dissatisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). Hygiene factors do not assure employee satisfaction and thus are called dissatisfiers or maintenance factors (Herzberg et al., 1959). Hygiene factors relate to proper or poor employee treatment (Herzberg, 1974), which cover tangible aspects of work life (Gbededo & Liyanage, 2018). Examples advanced as hygiene factors include company policy, salary, working conditions, status, interpersonal relationships with superiors and peers, and job security.

Motivation factors, otherwise called satisfiers, culminate into satisfaction for the employees. The scholarly definition of employee motivation is the feeling, effort, energy, and driving force an employee uses to achieve individual or organizational goals (Sabbagha et al., 2018). Motivational factors include empowerment and recognition on the job (Kotni & Karumuri, 2018). Motivators are inherent or intrinsic to the job and rewarding (Herzberg et al., 1959). These motivators include job recognition, a sense of achievement, growth, responsibility, and the nature or enrichment of the job itself (Herzberg et al., 1959). While the hygiene factors are physiological, motivators are psychological (Herzberg et al., 1959). Therefore, physiological factors determine satisfaction or the lack of it, while psychological factors result in motivation or the lack of it.

Rationale for Herzberg's Two Factor Theory

For this study, I considered the theories by Herzberg, Maslow, and McGregor as a viewing lens of the research into strategies for increasing employee retention. The theory most intertwined with Herzberg's two-factor theory is Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Though content theories of motivation are associated with Maslow, Herzberg, McGregor, and McClelland (Sharma et al., 2019), one of the most prevalent theories is Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Solomon & Thorpe, 2018). Human needs exist in five hierarchy levels: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). Employees may desire a higher level of physiological need by wanting higher pay, recognition, more responsibility, better medical benefits, and improved work conditions. These requirements are consistent with Maslow's hierarchy of needs that individuals have physiological desires. With Maslow's theory, an individual's level of motivation or satisfaction advances on a single continuum, and human needs exist in hierarchies (Maslow, 1943). However, the two factors in Herzberg's theory exist on separate continuums. While Maslow (1943) stated that no need or drive exists in isolation, every need exists with the state of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of another. With Herzberg's theory, addressing the issue of satisfaction has no bearing on resolving issues on dissatisfaction. Employee turnover hinges on the continuums of ensuring satisfaction on the job on the one hand and eliminating dissatisfaction on the other. Hence, Maslow's theory may not appropriately address the issue of exploring strategies for increasing employee retention rates.

An alternative to Herzberg's two-factor theory considered for this qualitative multiple case study is the Theory X and Y by McGregor in 1960, anchored on employee behavior at work. McGregor (1960) formulated Theory X to represent negative emotions, behavior, and attitude of an employee to work. Under Theory X, McGregor considered an average employee lazy, requiring persuasion or compulsion to work. Employees under this category resist organizational change, dislike taking responsibilities, and require formal supervision or direction. Under Theory Y, employees have a cheerful disposition to their job and enjoy what they do. McGregor identified employees under this category exercise initiative, self-direction, self-control, show loyalty when rewarded, take responsibility, and exhibit sound skills and competencies. McGregor's theory was from the perspective of the employer or manager rather than of the employees. The X and Y theory may not be relevant to research on employee retention because the notion is to understand why employees want to leave – an outcome consequent on the opinion and decision of the employee and not the employer.

Common Themes Found During Research Inquiries

While researching literature resources for this study, common themes on the issue of employee retention became evident. These themes are (a) compensation, (b) work-life balance, (c) leadership, (d) structure, (e) alignment, (f) culture, and (h) human resources strategies. Each of these themes featured reasons why employees will either remain in an organization or leave.

Compensation

Compensation occurred in searches for sources on employee retention. Compensation is the payment employees receive in return for their services within an organization (Kim & Jang, 2020). Employees depend on compensation to maintain stability in their lives, while employers rely on employees' abilities and performance to maintain their competitiveness in the market (Kim & Jang, 2020). Compensation has a very significant relationship with employee retention (Bibi et al., 2017). However, the work environment is a moderating factor in the relationship between compensation and employee retention (Bibi et al., 2017). Compensation is a moderating factor for the effect of direct and indirect types of employee participation on employee retention (Khalid & Nawab, 2018). Compensation encourages employees to take on responsibilities that create a sense of worthiness and authority, resulting in improved retention (Khalid & Nawab, 2018). Compensation remains a linkage for employees and organizational goals and relates directly to talent retention (Sarkar, 2018). Therefore, compensation presented as an essential theme for consideration in the research into employee retention.

Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance was another theme that became evident in the literature search on employee retention. Work-life balance is an individual's achieving equilibrium in time spent working and not working (Hämmig et al., 2009). Work-life balance is a concept that reflects the balance between work, family commitments, and personal life (Hämmig et al., 2009). For example, a study in a hospital environment, work units with a balanced work-life culture displayed enhanced employee engagement and higher intentions to remain with the organization (Perrigino et al., 2019). All employees have needs and require support outside the work environment (Perrigino et al., 2019). Nonmonetary benefits, activities external to the work environment, and flexible work scheduling culminate in work-life balance for employees (Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2020). Without having some time off work for these needs and support, employees may become disgruntled. Thus, work-life balance is essential to achieving increased employee retention.

Leadership

Leadership involves the actions, guidance, behaviors displayed by an individual or a leader to influence others to achieve a common goal (Reed et al., 2019). Leadership functions play pivotal roles in linking leadership behaviors and positive organizational performance (Hyung-Woo, 2018). Hence, leadership is a function that should drive the quest for new knowledge supporting employee retention. A business leader may not achieve desired corporate objectives without the buy-in and active participation of employees and other organization members (Leidner et al., 2018). Different leadership styles may lead to higher employee productivity, enhancing the possibilities of reaching the maximum success of chosen employee retention strategies.

There are different leadership styles. A specific leadership style may not be effective in all situations (Salehzadeh, 2017). Common forms of leadership that result in improved employee retention include (a) situational leadership style (Burns, 1978), (b) transformational leadership style (Dansereau et al., 1973), and (c) leader-member exchange (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969). There are many leadership styles, but the focus in this research was on those three forms.

Situational leadership allows a chameleon-like approach to leading others in a manner that ensures adaptation to changing situations. Hersey and Blanchard's (1969) situational leadership model is one of the most frequently used. Situational leadership allows for a response from the leader: knowing and applying the needed response (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969). Since the retail industry may experience frequent market changes associated with the nature of the products, existential world circumstances, and events such as pandemics, a situational leadership style may prove effective when managers try to align with employees towards achieving common goals.

Transformational leaders focus on changes and developing each employee's talent (Tuan & Rajagopal, 2019). The transformational leader recognizes and exploits a necessity or demand from a potential person to follow (Burns, 1978). Most employees want to learn, develop, and increase their dedication to the firm: the leaders' role is to stimulate such potentials (Tuan & Rajagopal, 2019). Whereas the situational leader focuses on individual leaders' ability to adapt to needs, a transformational leader inspires followers to achieve a given task.

The leader-member exchange (LMX) theory by Dansereau et al. (1973) conceptualized leadership as consisting of several dyadic relationships between a leader and other group members. The LMX theory established that a social exchange relationship that leaders establish with their workforce influences the treatment of individual employees (Donohue-Porter et al., 2019). Thus, with LMX, a manager and a direct report may maintain a two-way relationship different from how the leader interacts with subordinates.

Structure

Structure was a theme on the organizational constituents. In the study by Zapata (2019), the author explained structure as the organization's segmentation. A structure portrays what departments perform a particular function; employees who work in those departments; their positions, and even how the organization may interact externally. The structure or design within an institution depicts the form of institutional organization, the company's linkage to society, government, and several intangible aspects, including how it affects its environment (Zapata, 2019). Structure refers to the systems or means for motivating and coordinating humans, tasks, and technology variables within the salesforce (Hartmanna & Lussie, 2020). Managers' designing or implementation of employee retention strategies may require improved organizational and leadership structures. Further discussions under retail organizations expound further on organizational structure.

Alignment

Alignment is the outcome of streamlining the organization's strategic talent retention objective with HR management practices (Martinson & De Leon, 2018). In other words, understanding alignment involves focusing on the relationship between HR management practices (ensuring work-life balance, compensation, and work design) and job satisfaction and employee turnover intentions (Martinson & De Leon, 2018). The authors concluded that job satisfaction moderates the relationship between HR management practices and employees' turnover intention. Alignment is also a situation when both employees and management have a shared understanding of an organization’s strategy, purpose, or goal (Ungureanu et al., 2019).

From a performance function of HR management perspective, employees who perceive their job role as directly contributing to the organizational role and experience job satisfaction have a higher likelihood of remaining in the organization (Kalgin et al., 2018). Therefore, an alignment between employee role and corporate goal, on the one hand, and maintaining HR management practices that result in job satisfaction increases a sense of attachment and retention.

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is the totality of values, beliefs, and perceptions that influence people’s behavior within the system (Shumba et al., 2017). Culture is a prized asset an organization can possess that drives the right behaviors (Warrick, 2017). Organizational culture may be that corporate leaders employed must always possess critical skillsets that positively affect the enhancement of successful employee retention strategies. Skilled leaders motivating their subordinates may make work enjoyable. However, inertia may set in when subordinates draw no inspiration from their leader and work becomes monotonous, unchallenging, with no growth prospect. Inertia may occur when employees on the same job for a long time develop the feeling of no longer gaining anything out of their current position (Harju & Hakanen, 2016). Performance, commitment, turnover, and employee satisfaction may improve organizational culture and increase employee retention if appropriately managed. An exploration of health workers’ perception provided an insight into how organizational culture affects employee retention (Shumba et al., 2017). A proper focus on organizational culture, the aggregate of values, beliefs, and perceptions, may increase employee retention (Shumba et al., 2017).

Human Resource Strategies

Managers, whether in human resources or other departments, overseeing the workforce require strategies to ensure the retention of existing employees and the recruitment of new workers. A well-prepared HR strategy and an action plan for its implementation enable an organization to effectively design and manage individual processes to support its goals and respond flexibly to change (Vrchota & Řehoř, 2019). A revolving strategy may give organizations the flexibility to change and adapt to fluctuating market conditions, while HR flexibility may contribute to employee performance (Sabuhari et al., 2020).

The importance of maintaining a good team that functions together reflects competence, quality, and cohesion (Gendron et al., 2016). Training and career development are essential factors in retaining talents (Zaharee et al., 2018). Ensuring employee career advancement is a retention strategy and, the position one attains in an organization serves as an objective measure of achievements through the time and effort invested by an individual (Myrtle et al., 2008). Retail companies may benefit through opportunities to improve organizational roles for employees who decide to continue with the company. However, if career advancement does not exist, likely results may be employee dissatisfaction and turnover, with negative consequences for the organization.

Retail Organizations

Retail organizations have varying factors that may require further discussion and understanding. One factor that may be critical to understanding retail organizations is the differing structures adopted. A retail organization may be one of many formats: an independently owned retail location, part of a franchise model, or part of a larger corporate structure. The setup could be factory outlets, outdoor market sales, convenience stores, supermarkets, chain stores, electronic or mobile retailing, or multichannel retailing. No matter the structure of a retail organization, all retail organizations may face similar challenges. The development of new retail establishments encounters three main problems: locations of the offline stores, the price competition with online retail, and the difficulty in consumer recognition in the two channels (Wang & Ng, 2020). An independent retailer may face the same challenges as franchises or corporate retail models. Challenges that retailers face include costs associated with staff, stock, operations, and competition from larger retailers (Kenington et al., 2020).

Unlike an independent retail organization where one or more owners operate independently, the franchise retail model differs due to the outside influence of business practices. The structure of a franchise model differs due to the business owner contracting to employ coordinated marketing, product offerings, product trade-name franchises while functioning virtually like an authorized dealer with some territorial exclusivity, by paying the franchisor based on gross margins realized from the sale of the branded merchandise (Dant et al., 2011). Conversely, organizations such as Apple and Amazon have corporate retail locations owned and operated by either the corporation or manufacturers of their products and retailed directly to their consumers. The Apple Store opened in the marketplace as a direct distribution outlet for their products (Miles et al., 2019).

The retail industry provides an opportunity for customers to acquire resources needed for everyday life and concurrently for organizations to derive profits. Organizational sales factors refer to organizations' components and their administration that support the optimal performance of salespeople (Herjanto & Franklin, 2019). Retail employees can generally either work in a brick-and-mortar location or be representatives of an online retail organization. Retail organizations are prevalent in the United States and around the world. The U.S. retail e-commerce sales for the second quarter of 2021, was $222.5 billion (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). The retail industry is one of the major contributors to the service sector. However, in today's competitive business environment, the retail industry is under intense pressure to systematically produce quality standards, enhance customer satisfaction, and generate positive bottom-line results (Madhani, 2020). Hence, the retail industry is of global importance to world economies and may be worthy of further research.

The need to retain high-performing employees becomes a focus phenomenon for both retail organizations and HR professionals. Considering that people are crucial to earning business profits, attracting, thriving, and retaining the right employees may be important for retail organizations. An organization's ability to retain its employees is closely related to achieving high-performance levels and earning more significant business results (Rose & Raja, 2016). For an organization to be successful and profitable, its management may need to develop a highly talented and long-tenured workforce.

Without employees, who are the link to customers, a retail organization may lose the ability to interact with its consumers and lose relationships with both consumers and employees. Developing these relationships requires communication, learning, trust, commitment, and shared meanings (Larentis et al., 2018). These employees are critical to brand reputation, brand loyalty, and customers' buying intention or patronage. Moreover, loyalty corresponds to a relationship of trust, and for this reason, researchers often measure employee loyalty in terms of intention to leave (Benraïss-Noailles & Viot, 2020). Concomitantly, good salespeople prefer to belong to sustainable organizations committed to their employment (Letchmiah & Thomas, 2017). Therefore, a cognitive misalignment between these employees' personal beliefs, values, and business practices may result in turnover intentions and eventual exit.

Human Resources Management

Organizations require a system or mechanism for attracting, motivating, developing, and retaining talented employees. The coordination of such systems entails the essence of human resource management. Human resource management involves developing employees (Elarabi & Johari, 2014; Wairimu & Ndeto, 2019). This role of managing human resources extends beyond talent acquisitions and the development and implementation of systems that require cooperative communication among the workforce (Elarabi & Johari, 2014). Therefore, human resources management cuts across the organization and is relevant to ensuring an improvement in the retention rate of employees and crafting strategies for achieving the same.

Retail companies require competent human resource professionals with the capacity to manage the complexities of an industry. Human resource managers in the retail industry are involved in a wide-ranging spectrum of tasks - procurement, storekeeping, book-keeping, sales and marketing, training, and customer service (Sinha et al., 2018). All these are crucial links in the chain. Functional management areas, such as production, marketing, finance, and operations, involve human resource management (Elarabi & Johari, 2014). Thus, managers with practical skills for identifying, attracting, training, motivating, and retaining talent by understanding what is important in a working environment to retail employees are critical to a profitable organization. HRMs with coordinating responsibility should ensure the buy-in of other functional or line managers in the quest for identifying successful employee retention strategies.

Human resources management must motivate retail employees to maximize the value created. Retail store employees will have improved morale if they have the right supervision to perform better (Sadewo et al., 2021). Considering that employees are essential internal assets of an organization, using models to highlight the importance of these assets towards achieving an advantage over competing companies may be invaluable in crafting successful employee retention strategies. The use of sustainability-based business models helps companies create a trusting environment for innovation, leading to long-term competitiveness (Lee et al., 2018). A recognized model in human resources management is the resource-based view (RBV).

Resource-Based View

Penrose (1959), introducing the RBV, pointed out strategies for effectively managing organizational resources. Linkages exist among organizational resources, productive opportunities or capabilities, and the company's growth potential or competitiveness (Penrose, 1959). Retail organizations require an optimal combination of their resources to achieve their objective of profitable competitiveness. RBV serves as a consistent foundation for the classic theory of business policy (Wernerfelt, 1984). Modern RBVs align with the premise that management systems combine various organizational resources to achieve competitive advantage (Akwesi, 2019). A firm that attracts rare and valuable human resources due to its unique historical path may acquire a unique competitive advantage and brand differentiation that other firms cannot duplicate (Nagano, 2020). Strategies anchored on strong human resource policies reflecting high levels of investment in employees are significantly and positively related to higher levels of firm performance (Collins, 2020). Hence, an improved retention rate may be achievable with proper human resource management leveraging sound models.

People Analytics

People analytics is an aspect of human resources management worthy of understanding for maximizing the available local talent pool resulting in fewer costs and a higher return on investment (ROI) in talents. People analytics is an area of human resource management practice, research, and innovation concerned with using information technologies (Tursunbayeva et al., 2018). HRMs cannot overlook any role conflict within an organization, which may exist when any specific job function gets disproportionate attention over others and, in turn, has too great of an influence on the hiring or dismissal processes. Moreover, this discordance can become confounded should these two roles be further supplemented with obligations to provide social support

(Podgorodnichenko et al., 2020). In enacting their human resources job responsibilities, HRMs exercise considerable influence and control over who gains access to the organization, including potential employees (Mackaway & Winchester-Seeto, 2018).

Balanced Scorecard

A strategy that HRMs may use to achieve the organization's desired alignment is a semistandard structured report called the balanced scorecard (BSC). The BSC system, introduced by Kaplan and Norton (1992), correlates the success criterion with short and long-term goals. BSC is a useful strategy performance management tool that provides managers a quick and comprehensive view of business (Chopra et al., 2017). Where the HR department has an influential power level within an organization, proper alignment of employee guidelines with corporate goals and strategies may enhance retention rates for retail employees.

A BSC system involves specifying the vision and strategy of an organization and further breaking these down into suitable evaluation criteria (Yilmaz & Antmen, 2019). The BSC's use breaks down the strategic goal of an organization into key measurable areas to assess progress. These measurable areas could be customer and stakeholder needs, finance, internal processes, capacity building, or learning and growth through cause-and-effect relationships (Abagissa, 2019). Employees buy into a strategy they understand has the focus of the whole organization. In combination with other methods, the BSC system allows for a more effective decision-making process.

HR systems characterized by distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus encourage shared perceptions among employees, resulting in coordinated actions supporting organizational goals (Nishii & Paluch, 2018). A commonly shared opinion is top management's attitude towards their organization's human resources goals and defined roles responsible for HR-related issues (Kuimet, 2019). When corporate leaders include employees as partners in the search for working systems, unique strategies may evolve that assure optimal efficiencies better than adopting practices of external organizations.

Job satisfaction was the most studied turnover cause in the 20th century, though only modestly correlating with voluntary employee turnover (Lee et al., 2018). Analytical processes help to identify retail employees experiencing job satisfaction. The supervisor of those same retail employees may be essential to job satisfaction identification. When ensuring the right employees are within an organization, it is crucial to consider that the degree of willingness to serve an organization could impact the employee-manager psychological contract and, in turn, affect job performance (Warnock-Smith et al., 2020). Applying Herzberg's two-factor theory may produce positive results while identifying job satisfaction within a workforce.

HRMs are a valuable resource for the successful implementation of employee retention strategies. HRMs themselves are employees who understand in real-time the correct application of strategy, what works about the project, failures, and what suggestions may become available for adjustments within the project. By focusing on the positive consequences of efforts to resolve misfits, managers can make the best of a problematic situation that could lead to adverse outcomes if left unmanaged (Follmer et al., 2018).

There are differences in expectations and implemented actions between employees and managers (Pereira et al., 2016). A manager's conversations with employees need to align with the organization's chosen employee retention strategy. While these conversations should be free-flowing, discussions may require guidance to identify employee motivation and hygiene factors to support organizational strategies. Developing a workforce to meet present and future market needs postulate the identification of required competencies (Hecklau et al., 2016).

Successful management requires that managers know the people they oversee, and this knowledge must derive from unpredictable responses and behaviors of other actors (González et al., 2016). A suggestion may be to create an open and honest dialogue, which is purposeful for all parties involved in strategy identification. These strategy identification processes may result in two outcomes for the organization. One of the outcomes is that using Herzberg's two-factor theory as the viewing lens into the phenomenon of retention rates may allow HRMs to gain an increased knowledge of factors associated with successful employee retention. Another possible result is that employees may have heightened confidence in their organization's consequent ethical employer-employee engagement.

Employee Retention in the Digital Age

Digital transformation is the change in business processes, operations, and structures to exploit the benefits of technology. In searching for a competitive advantage through digital transformation and technology, strategy researchers acknowledge human capital, intellectual capital, and knowledge as critical components to explore (Fenech et al., 2019). Previously, the lack of workers' rights allowed organizations to run the marketplace with complete control over productive and unproductive employees. Organizations had no social responsibility to the workers or their families. Laws such as the equal pay act, the civil rights act, fair labor, and the standards act, to mention a few, helped change the marketplace and restored partial market power to the employee. The mission for organizations is to ensure that their workforces are healthy and well educated, then nurture the awareness and proficiencies required to create productive employees and proactive citizens that contribute to society (Chams & García-Blandón, 2019).

While the acts described the issue of enhancing workers' rights, they also preserve the ability of the employee of an organization to exit voluntarily when better opportunities are available. In turn, this may result in a situation whereby organizations' concerns extend beyond a focus on marketplace competition to competing for talent acquisition. Undoubtedly, talent management developments are not only shaking the traditional and established practice of HR, but they also create threats and opportunities for management.

The social networking experience has connected the world closer together and supports individuals from growing further apart. As the world continues to experience genuine transformational change driven by technological advances and people analytics, one new source of competitive advantage is the focus on best-fit employees. Understanding employees' needs and fulfilling needs can be compelling (Walford-Wright & Scott-Jackson, 2018). With the introduction of social networking, employers and prospective applicants gain access to newer positive possibilities. Applicants have instant visibility into many job opportunities, and employers have access to a pool of superior employable talents.

During the 19th century, organizations faced a need to develop a new understanding of the workforce landscape. As it is known today, human resources management originated in attempts by scholars from American universities to understand labor problem in the last quarter of the nineteenth century (De Amorim et al., 2019). Organizations are now tasked with understanding and adapting to an ever-changing worker's social landscape. Companies now use blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and instant messages to keep both current and future employees continuously updated on value propositions offered by the company (Priyadarshini et al., 2017). The ability to find work outside an applicant's local environment may have been peculiar to in-person networking or career services; potential employees now connect with organizations across multiple marketplaces.

In contrast to viewing print newspaper advertising for recruitment of research participants, an estimated sixty million people across the United States use an online advert platform, Craigslist, each month (Gioia et al., 2016). Furthermore, eighty million job advertisements feature on the platform each month (Gioia et al., 2016). The time before digital advertisements seemingly limited organizations to recruiting from their local communities, with limited resources, such as hiring agencies and universities, at their disposal (Gioia et al., 2016).

Currently, organizations and employees have unprecedented access to one another, which may not have existed at any other time in history. Generation Y and

Generation Z have grown up in the era of the internet, social media, and smartphones (Sivathanu & Pillai, 2018). They have different expectations from their employers, such as anytime/anywhere collaboration, instant feedback, open culture, and data-driven decisions (Sivathanu & Pillai, 2018). A person seeking employment living in the most rural locations in the United States can now reach out to organizations worldwide for employment opportunities. Conversely, organizations have the same to reach prospective employees through online services to advertise their open positions.

Organizations may need to be more appealing to potential employees versus their competition in social employment marketplaces. The use of social media tools to identify and communicate with prospective employees is pervasive. There is also growing adoption of mobile access to job application submission and tracking, artificial intelligence, and predictive analytics to evaluate candidates (DiRomualdo et al., 2018). The need to be more appealing is different from the past due to influences from digital platforms on potential employees. Employers should source and recruit the best-talented candidates (Guiseppi, 2017). Prospective employees may identify a company's flaws through open resource online platforms such as Glassdoor, offering rated scores of organizations. Thus, at their discretion and with anonymity, applicants may review an organization before applying for employment.

Organizations can now project the attractiveness of their work environments to prospective employees remotely consequent on leveraging technological advancement. Successful work environments do not emerge from happenstance but from deliberate and strategic initiatives to attract, engage, and retain employees (Dabirian et al., 2017).

Organizations may benefit enormously from using online platforms of recruiting agencies to source potential employees that align with the corporate employee retention strategy. Conversely, organizations not quick to address negative public reviews of their brand on online platforms may suffer catastrophic consequences.

Given that online platforms allow organizations unprecedented access to the local and world labor markets, managers in retail organizations have the relevant information needed to tailor successful employee retention strategies to their company's needs. The online access may enable HRMs to understand information trending on the labor force at any given moment. Additionally, information garnered may allow HRMs to learn how to maximize the social needs of their employees within the existing workforce while appealing to external candidates.

Human resources management involves identifying the best fit workers for job roles. Organizations differentiate talents from other employees (Narayanan et al., 2019) and require skills relevant to business operations. Individuals who use social media for professional development may become attracted by groups and communities of professionals doing the same job (Bizzi, 2018). HRMs may access analytical data on best-fit prospects from digital platforms such as the work history, skills, expectations about job roles, healthcare, work culture, a performance reward system, and remuneration (Sila & Širok, 2018). With this information, HRMs may craft and enhance successful retention strategies.

There are positive and negative effects of the introduction of digital or technological advancement regarding employee retention. While social media can bring about positive effects, it can give rise to a range of harmful unintended side effects (Quinn, 2018). One reason for this risk may be that individuals who experience personal slight may post harmful content online, affecting the public image and, in turn, the organization's economic stability (Quinn, 2018). This negative aspect of employee retention in the digital age can be burdensome for the organization, if not entirely dangerous.

A major challenge for HR departments of organizations is to retain talented people and to attract new talent into their workforce. In the present digital age, organizations operate within highly global, interconnected, and dynamic environments (Miguel & Pedro, 2017), and information passes across quickly. With the vast internet reach, any adverse action performed either by an organization towards its employees or by an employee against an organization may instantly become communicated to the world. Better awareness of employers and employees that social media data may be useful in recruitment and employment decisions can result in fewer terminations and disciplinary actions (Boudlaie et al., 2019). At the press of a button on someone's phone, information may pass across on a multitude of electronic devices in the form of a tweet, a share on Instagram or Facebook, and dedicated services such as Glassdoor. Thus, because of the vast possibilities of digital communication, HRMs, organizations, and employees may influence the success or failure of an employee retention strategy through consequences associated with their online behavior.

Digital Retail Service Acceptance Due to Covid-19 and the Effect on Employee Retention

Digitalization in the economic and financial world is changing the behavior of economic agents. People are increasingly demanding financial services that are fast, cheap, and safe, while there is more interest from consumers for the provision of digital services in their retail experience (Trisnowati et al., 2020). During the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a significant shift from conventional to electronic transaction methods, with people tending to switch to online shopping through e-commerce sites (Aulawi et al., 2021). Covid-19's impact on some retail markets, such as e-commerce, possibly benefited some organizations. More retail organizations may employ digital retail services to address staffing challenges and present sanitary and clean locations. Digitized services such as AI-enabled consumer choice assistance, recommendations, and e-commerce help retailers build delivery capabilities such as buy online and pick up offline options while providing support and payment competencies through automated customer service and digital payment offerings (Shankar et al., 2021).

Both Amazon and Walmart have employed methods of customer self-check-out. These self-check-out methods allow consumers to have a shopping experience almost void of human interaction, and the experience exists for those who dislike standing in a checkout line. Sophisticated technology tracks their purchases, allows them to exit the store without a physical checkout, and automatically charges their account (Polacco, & Backes, 2018). To face the COVID-19 pandemic, governments in various countries created social restriction policies that influenced people's daily behavior (Trisnowati et al., 2020). These social distancing restrictions made people embrace the option of making electronic transactions (Trisnowati et al., 2020). This acceptance of digital retail services by both consumers and retailers may negatively impact HRMs' efforts to successfully implement retention strategies for retail employees because of the possibility of fewer job openings in retail organizations. However, replacing workers with machines may generate social, legal, or cultural obstacles such as unions or social movements unrest (Dodel & Mesch, 2020). Therefore, maintaining a balance between digitalization or automation and successful retention strategies for retail workers becomes more vital than ever.

Transition

Section 1 of this study contained the problem statement, purpose statement, nature of the study, and justification for the choice of research method and design. The literature review included discussions on the business problem of strategies that managers of retail organizations use to increase the retention rates of retail employees. Herzberg's two-factor theory served as the viewing lens. Section 2 includes a restatement of the purpose of the study, the role of the researcher, description of participants, research method and design, populations and sampling, and ways of ensuring compliance with ethical requirements. I described the data collection instruments, techniques adopted, data organization and analysis, with consideration for ensuring reliability and validity. Section 3 contains the presentation of findings, application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, and suggestions for future research. I also discussed my reflections on the research process and conclusions.

Section 2: The Project

In Section 2, there is a restatement of the purpose of the study and a detailed description of participant selection criteria. Discussions in Section 2 include the role of the researcher, methodology and design, population and sampling, and ethical research considerations. Other areas include data collection instruments, data collection techniques, data organization, analysis, and efforts to ensure the study's reliability and validity. This section ends with a transition summary of topics discussed in Section 2, with insight into Section 3.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore successful strategies that managers of retail organizations use to increase the retention of retail employees. The targeted population consisted of managers of three retail organizations in Michigan who successfully implemented strategies to increase retention of retail employees. Successful employee retention helps to avoid recruitment costs (Ketprapakorn & Kantabutra, 2019). Implications for social change are that businesses could improve employee retention rates and avoid recruitment costs. The self-dignity and professionalism of managers of retail organizations may improve due to their ability to increase retail employees' retention. Society may benefit from the reduction in unemployment consequent upon the increased retention of retail employees.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher includes acquiring, storing, and analyzing information for solving the central business problem in a study (Cumyn et al., 2019). I collected, stored, and analyzed information on the phenomenon of low employee retention in the retail industry. Researchers also decide on the research question, develop suitable measures, analyze data, and interpret the results (Stedman, 2019). Further, a researcher reflects on the ethical dimensions of each step of research, from formulating a question to disseminating results (Cumyn et al., 2019). As the researcher, I assumed full responsibility for the actions taken during this study and implemented all participant protection requirements. I obtained factual data relevant to the business problem and analyzed the same.

Researchers reflect on the ethical dimensions of each step of research, from the formulation of a question to the dissemination of results (Cumyn et al., 2019). Tasks for consideration are identifying the boundary between research and practice, determining the role of risk–benefit analyses in human subjects research, outlining appropriate guidelines for subject selection, and providing criteria for genuine informed consent (Friesen et al., 2017). In 1979, the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research Commission (NCPHSBBR) issued the *Belmont Report*, a regulation on ensuring human subjects' protection during research. The *Belmont Report* has three principles of respect for persons, beneficence (minimal injury to research subjects), and justice (NCPHSBBR, 1979). To comply with the principle of respect for persons, participation in this research was voluntary. Participants signed an informed consent form as proof of noncoercion. For beneficence, I protected the identity of participants and the organization they work in. Researchers should aim to reduce the burden of research participation by ensuring that the research benefits outweigh the risks (Kabacińska et al., 2020). I adopted a labeling system that ensured the confidentiality of participants. Critical aspects of a research study (e.g., the method of recruiting participants and the use of an interview protocol) may affect the relationship between the researcher and the study participants and influence the trustworthiness of data collected or the study result (Johnson et al., 2020). Therefore, to comply with the principle of justice, I ensured an objective process for selecting participants. The selection of participants was free of bias, and only individuals that meet the eligibility criteria qualified for selection through the purposeful sampling method.

No research study is without bias. However, efforts to reduce bias are not without value (Fleming, 2019). Given the likelihood that researchers may have inherent bias associated with the business phenomenon explored, I avoided pre-empting the study's outcome based on my work experience or worldview. My working experience has been in the consumer-packaged-goods (CPG) industry and not related to strategies for increasing employee retention in the retail industry. I have been a consumer-packaged goods employee selling to retail organizations. However, I never had the responsibility to create, implement, or ensure successful employee retention strategies in the retail industry. My working experience spread across Washington, Montana, and particularly Oregon, where I live, and within the research area. To mitigate bias, I conducted this research with an open mind and a deliberate consciousness to achieve a data-driven analysis and, ultimately, data saturation.

Other roles of a researcher during the data collection stage are (a) following the line of inquiry, as reflected in the case study interview protocol and (b) verbalizing actual questions (conversational) in an unbiased manner that addresses the line of inquiry (Yin, 2018). An interview protocol is highly desirable (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The protocol contains prompts for the interviewer to collect informed consent, includes a script of what to say before and after the interview, and helps maintain focus on the information intended for collection (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The use of interview protocol (see Appendix A) ensured consistency in the data collection process.

Participants

Managers drawn from three retail organizations in Michigan participated in this study. Participant recruitment seems the most difficult aspect of the research process (Williams, 2020). However, I identified individuals whose experience and eligibility made them relevant to the research with predefined selection criteria. Eligible participants were managers of three retail organizations in Michigan with a minimum age of 18 years. Before joining the study, all participants signed a consent form.

I leveraged professional associations, trade affiliations, job search platforms such as Indeed and LinkedIn, public emails, or phone numbers on company websites to identify retail organizations and access participants. Employment advertisements on LinkedIn often show contact person’s information in the profile display. Using this approach to identify participants for this study provided two benefits: a way to identify retail organizations relevant to the study and finding information for gaining direct access to participants that fit the search criteria.To locate potential organizations that employ retail professionals in the United States, I filtered vacancies in retail organizations operating in the chosen research geography. Connecting with people at the top of a hierarchy insulated by layers of employees, from receptionists to communications directors, who act as gatekeepers can be a challenge (Marland & Esselment, 2019). However, I adopted the strategy suggested in previous research, contacting, building, and sustaining relationships with key individuals (Amundsen et al., 2017). I identified and contacted potential participants, then explained the purpose of the study while assuring confidentiality for participation. Having obtained the contacts of eligible participants, I sent them each an IRB-approved invitation by email with a consent form attached.

Depending on the type of study, researchers must establish a professional relationship with participants to gather necessary and relevant data (Thurairajah, 2019). Researchers must accurately describe any foreseeable risks and procedures to potential participants to maintain confidentiality (Hammack et al., 2019). To establish a working relationship with participants, I made them feel at ease by explaining the informed consent process. Participants signed the informed consent form to indicate voluntary participation in the study. All interactions with participants during the interviews were professional.

Research Method and Design

Researchers may choose one method and design from the options available for carrying out the research. The choice of the method and design depends on the overarching research question (Yin, 2018). Therefore, the selection of the best fit method and design is crucial to successful research.

Research Method

The central research question in this study was the basis for the research methodology chosen. Three research methods available to researchers are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Saunders et al., 2016). I used the qualitative method for this study. By attempting to answer how or why questions, qualitative methods are suitable for exploring respondents' experiences and obtaining deeper, meaningful insights into real-life situations (Olubiyi et al., 2019). The goal of using a qualitative research method is to present a non-statistical representation of data (Haven & Grootel, 2019). Conducting qualitative research enables researchers to gain insight into non-statistical data like participants' feelings and behaviors (Rahman, 2016). Therefore, using the qualitative method for the study afforded exploring various strategies that leaders of retail organizations may use to increase the retention rate of retail employees. The qualitative method aligned best with the purpose of this study and, therefore, my chosen methodology.

The quantitative method involves concluding a convincing argument based on numerical data in response to a research question (Hjalmarson & Moskal, 2018). In other words, using a quantitative method allows researchers to make reliable decisions by understanding a business phenomenon through the analysis of numerical data. Quantitative methods involve construct measurements expressed in numerical form and analyzed using mathematical operations (Matta, 2019). The use of statistical data allows researchers to derive measures to establish information such as trends in behavior. This study did not involve analyzing numerical measurements or testing hypotheses about variables, relationships, and groups' differences. Hence, I decided that the quantitative method was not the best choice for this study.

A mixed methodology involves a researcher combining multiple research approaches within one study (Schoonenboom, 2018). Mixed method research is a process in which the researchers determine that the project requires combining quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry (Kaur, 2016). Researchers apply quantitative or qualitative methods in the study process and combine or mix these methods (Ivankova & Wingo, 2018). A benefit of using the mixed method within a research study is the possibility of gaining a more in-depth understanding of phenomena (Plastow, 2016). Mixed methods require conducting studies of longer duration compared to using either the qualitative or quantitative method alone (Plastow, 2016). The extended length of time and the quantitative features involved made mixed methods not desirable for this study. Therefore, I did not choose the mixed method.

Research Design

Researchers should be aware of the different research designs available to make the appropriate choice (Jaradat, 2018). The qualitative designs considered for this research were phenomenology, ethnography, and case study. However, the case study was the design of choice. Case studies are appropriate for exploring a phenomenon in real-world settings and identifying emerging themes and patterns (Pihlajamaa et al., 2019). Using case study design guarantees triangulation, enhancing validity through a convergence of findings, sources, or methods (Farquhar et al., 2020). Adopting multiple case studies allow cross-case comparisons, unlike a single case study (Guetterman & Fetters, 2018). I used the multiple case study design for exploring successful employee retention strategies.

Phenomenology is a research design in which researchers focus on how individuals or groups perceive lived experiences of a given phenomenon (McAlpine, 2016). With phenomenology, researchers understand the essence of a social event through individuals who had past encounters or lived experiences (Ataro, 2020). However, I did not choose phenomenology because the purpose of this study was not to understand a social phenomenon through the perception of individuals or groups of people.

Ethnography is a method through which researchers gain insight into participants' cultural practices (Wijngaarden, 2017). Ethnography involves work in the field and may require data collection techniques such as observation, focus groups, and interviews, either in combination or individually (Sinead Ryan, 2017). Due to its informal nature, ethnography has the potential for eliciting information that may not readily be accessible to researchers in a more formal setting or interview process (Von Koskull et al., 2016). The purpose of conducting this study was not to gain insights into cultural practices. Therefore, I did not use the ethnography research design.

I achieved data saturation through the methodological triangulation of data. Saturation occurs in data collection when researchers can no longer obtain additional or new information (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Researchers triangulate data using multiple methods, several theories, or different data sources to strengthen the credibility of a research inquiry (Jentoft & Olsen, 2019). I generated data from an in-depth literature review, participant interviews, and information from the organization's websites that describe adopted processes for hiring or terminating employees. A document review can be an additional data source or constitute the whole data set (Taşkın & Aksoy, 2019). I also had participants member-check syntheses of responses obtained during interviews to ensure that data collected was complete and not repetitive.

Population and Sampling

The targeted population consisted of managers of three retail organizations in Michigan who used successful strategies to increase retention of retail employees. For this study, the sample size was three: a manager from each of three retail organizations in Michigan. The use of a small sample size contributes to achieving replication in research (Hamlin, 2017) and makes achieving data saturation easy (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

The selection of participants was by purposeful sampling. Sampling in qualitative research has a broad connotation (Gentles & Vilches, 2017). Therefore, choosing the appropriate sampling method for a qualitative study is essential and requires researchers to address it from different perspectives (Gentles & Vilches, 2017; Guetterman, 2020). Purposeful sampling aligns with the case study design of inquiry into the phenomenon of employee retention. Purposeful sampling is the identification and selecting information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). With purposeful sampling, researchers focus on the research and establish crucial definitions, such as the boundaries of a case (Farrugia, 2019a).

The criteria for participant selection was to ensure alignment with the purpose of this study. Eligible interviewees were managers, who work in a retail organization, above 18 years old, and had experience using successful strategies to increase retention of retail employees. The use of semistructured, face-to-face interviews ensured obtaining qualitative information from participants. The use of open-ended interview questions in this study with follow-up questions also enabled data saturation, which occurs when no new analytical information arises anymore, and the study yields maximum details on the phenomenon (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

Ethical Research

The informed consent process is of paramount importance to safeguard a person's autonomy about his or her willingness to participate in research (Sil & Kanti Das, 2017). Researchers encounter ethical challenges in qualitative research: withdrawal from the study, anonymity, and confidentiality (Ngozwana, 2018). The improvement of participants' knowledge of research information is crucial and achieved by exploring new or familiar approaches that promote understanding and ultimately lead to informed consent (Ditai et al., 2018). Participants signed the informed consent form (see Appendix B), indicating understanding of the content and voluntary participation.

The informed consent form includes a summary of the research purpose, potential risks, and an explanation that participation is voluntary and confidential, with information on any associated benefit – remuneration or incentive (Onen & Balli, 2020; Thorpe, 2014). Another content of the form is that participants may withdraw from a study without penalty by expressing such an intention to the researcher via phone or in writing via email (Thorpe, 2014). At the beginning of each interview session, I explained each component of the informed consent form. Participants understood that participation was voluntary with no monetary benefit but with an assurance that they could withdraw from the study, at any time, by email or a telephone call without penalty. To ensure that participants understood the content, I read aloud the content of the informed consent form before commencing the interview session. The informed consent form is part of the listing in the table of contents.

Obtaining approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) was the first step in ensuring ethical compliance before the commencement of data collection for this study. Farrugia (2019b) emphasized that a researcher needs to attain ethical approval by an appointed IRB before commencing a research project with human participants. IRBs in the United States stress the maximum guarantee of the informants' confidentiality and anonymity possible (Surmiak, 2018). Ensuring the confidentiality of communications in the researcher-participant relationship is crucial to acquiring valid and reliable data (Palys et al., 2019).

To mitigate injury to participants, using a labeling system ensured the confidentiality of participants and the organizations they work in. For example, the labeling for participants was with alphanumeric code P1 to P3. Researchers should implement technical and organizational measures to protect the personal data against unauthorized disclosure (Surmiak, 2018). The need to ensure confidentiality is particularly acute when disclosure of information could harm participants through public humiliation, loss of social position, loss of employment, loss of insurability, or incarceration (Olubiyi et al., 2019). Participants received assurance of the confidentiality of their identities. All data (hard and electronic form stored on a flash drive) from this study will remain in a secure safe deposit box in a bank for five years before eventual destruction.

Data Collection Instruments

For this study, I was the primary data collection instrument. Researchers are generally the main instrument of the research, collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and reporting the study's findings (Shufutinsky, 2020; Yin, 2018). Seasoned researchers consider the investigative exercise the core of their profession and often describe it as the lens through which facts become discovered, gathered, preserved, and prepared (Luizzo, 2019). I collected data for this study using an extant review of literature, a semi-structured interview, and a document review of externally facing information of retail organizations.

Semi-structured interviews can be any of the following: face-to-face, telephone, text/email, individual, group, brief, or in-depth (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Current digital landscape changes enable qualitative researchers to expand traditional data collection methods (Twis et al., 2020). Unlike telephone interviews, teleconferencing interviews had the benefit to both the interviewer and participant to see each other during the session despite being in different locations (Seitz, 2015). I asked semi-structured questions, using the interview protocol as a guiding tool.

Smartphones could be useful to record semi-structured interviews conducted with participants (Matlala & Matlala, 2018). Thus, the recording feature on my smartphone became useful to document the interview session. Alternatively, Skype is convenient because of its different plug-ins and auto-record features for calls, for which participants give consent (Al-Khateeb, 2018). The relevance of Skype stem from its prevalence in the digital market and its audio-visual function, allowing for sound and visual contact between researchers and participants (Adams & Longhurst, 2017).

I followed the interview protocol and conducted member checking to enhance the interview process's reliability and validity. The interview protocol is in the table of contents and an attachment to the study. The interview protocol for this study contained the initial steps of the interview, a listing of the interview questions, and finally, the member checking process.

Other names for member checking are participant verification, informant feedback, respondent validation applicability, and external validity (Mohammadi-Nasrabadi et al., 2020). Member checking may include sharing all the results with the participants to analyze the findings and commenting on them critically (Mohammadi-Nasrabadi et al., 2020). In this study, each participant received a typed synthesis of their responses to confirm their intended message's accurate representation. Participants corrected wrong captions, provided new information, and offered further clarification to their initial responses.

Data Collection Technique

Qualitative data derives from participants' verbal narratives, observation field notes, interview transcripts, journals, documents, literature reviews, and thematic analyses with coding and sorting techniques (Clark & Vealé, 2018). I used a literature review, semistructured interviews, and a document review of externally facing information of retail organizations to collect data for this study. The use of a reliable interview protocol guided the interview process. I searched various databases for relevant scholarly works on the specific business problem and the conceptual framework. An extensive literature review impacts the transferability of findings (Munthe-Kaas et al., 2020) and presents a veritable data source for research (Cronin, 2014). To gain current insight into the subject matter of the inquiry, I set search filters to find peer-reviewed sources, with most having dates within 5 years of anticipated completion of this study.

The conduct of interviews may be face-to-face, on the telephone, or by text/email (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Qualitative data collection is no longer synonymous with in-person face-to-face research (Namey et al., 2020). I conducted in-person semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. Having made contact and agreed on the timing of interview sessions with participants, I commenced the proceedings with their go ahead. Participants got a brief description of the purpose of the research and went through the informed consent process. No participant continued with the interview signing the informed consent form. With the permission of participants, the audio recording of the interview session started. Using the interview protocol, I asked the interview questions and probed for clarity.

A reliable interview protocol is vital to obtain useful quality interview data (Yeong et al., 2018). However, developing a proper interview protocol is not a simple task, especially for beginner-level researchers (Yeong et al., 2018). The interview protocol lists the three aspects of the interview process: the initial interview, interview questions, and follow-up member checking. I asked open-ended questions, which Claus (2019) observed, enable respondents to provide in-depth explanations in their own words about their experiences, perceptions, and other relevant information about a research phenomenon. Participants answered nine predefined interview questions, with probing follow-up questions for issues that required further clarification. The interview session did not exceed 45 minutes. I transcribed and synthesised participants' responses within fourteen days of the interview sessions. Participants underwent scheduled member checking process to ensure that my interpretation of their answers was correct.

The third data collection technique was the review of documents on retail organizations' website that described hiring and firing processes used. Documents are veritable sources of additional data or constitute the whole data set (Taşkın & Aksoy, 2019). I browsed the website of retail organizations and downloaded open-access public documents and information.

All data collection techniques require skill on the part of a researcher, and all produce a large amount of raw data (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). Each method has its advantages and drawbacks. Interviews by Skype and other similar technologies are easy to conduct from the comfort of one's home, eliminating the need to travel and finding an appropriate venue (Iacono et al., 2016). Another advantage of using a face-to-face interview is gaining an in-depth understanding of a participant's personal feelings towards a given subject. A disadvantage of in-person face-to-face interviews is the possibility of the interviewer influencing responses of participants by non-verbal behaviors and leading questions (Barrett & Twycross, 2018).

Participants may also feel some social pressure to be available at the agreed time and place (Oltmann, 2016). However, participants in this study displayed no signs of being under any pressure with their personal or work schedules. Extensive literature reviews enhance the transferability of research findings (Munthe-Kaas et al., 2020), while document review yields additional or new data sets (Taşkın & Aksoy, 2019). Pilot studies minimize harm and maximize the potential benefits for vulnerable research participants (Cohn et al., 2019). However, the process takes additional research time to maximize recruitment (Heath et al., 2018). Therefore, I did not carry out a pilot study before commencing data collection.

Qualitative researchers are susceptible to imposing personal beliefs and interests on the data analysis, thus, leading to potential biases (Santos et al., 2017). Participants during member checking verify the accuracy of data once the researcher completes data collection (Caretta & Pérez, 2019; Naidu & Prose, 2018). In a follow-up interview for member checking, participants validated my synthesis of their responses and confirmed that my interpretations of their answers were correct. I ensured data saturation by using member checking to establish that no newer data or information existed.

Data Organization Technique

For this study, I gathered data from three sources: literature review, interview of participants, and document review of externally facing information of retail organizations website that described the process for hiring or terminating their workforce. I protected the identity of participants and the organization they work in by using an alphanumeric code labeling system. Regardless of their form or content, data storage must be in a manner that assures efficient access (Yin, 2018). A well-organized data is crucial to successful data analysis (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Using separate files explicitly created for hard copy data from each source ensured an efficient information retrieval system.

I used the file labeling system to distinguish sub-data related to individual participants or events within each file category. Storage of soft data was in a flash drive with a similar file labeling structure as the hard copy filing system. I used a passworded computer for the study, but the data stored was on a flash drive. After the research, all hard copy files and soft data, analyzed and organized for this study, were kept on a secure flash drive in a personal safe deposit box at the bank and will remain so for 5 years. After this period, I will destroy all materials used in this study.

Data Analysis

The analysis of data for this study was by methodological triangulation. With methodological triangulation, researchers use multiple methods, several theories, or different data sources to achieve a research objective (Jentoft & Olsen, 2019; Yin, 2018). Triangulation involves deriving findings from many data sources (Yin, 2018). I triangulated by collecting research data from multiple sources and narrowing various facts, premises, propositions, and findings until reaching a valid conclusion. In this study, there were three sources of data: a literature review, semistructured interviews, and a review of external-facing documents that described the organization's process for hiring or terminating its workforce. The use of triangulation enhances gaining broader, in-depth, and accurate insights into the research phenomenon (Nwanna-Nzewunwa et al., 2019). The goal of triangulation was to validate themes derived from comparing one source of data against another and enhance the reliability and validity of this study.

I used the five phases of data analysis advocated by Yin (2016): compilation, disassembly, reassembly, interpretation, and concluding. To compile data, I searched for various scholarly literature relevant to the specific business problem and stored them in a manner that ensured ease of retrieval. After the interview sessions, I ensured that participants member-checked my interpretation of their responses for completeness and accuracy. Syntheses of interview responses also form part of data stored as part of compilations for the analysis. Compiling involves formally arranging all research data into a useful order (Yin, 2016). The storage of all the scholarly materials for research were in a manner that ensured efficient retrieval of information.

The second step of data analysis is disassembling (Yin, 2016) and involves breaking down data into components after ensuring consistent and organized data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). This study involved the conduct of extensive literature review and taking of reflective notes of themes and salient points relevant to answering the central research question. Identifying evolving constructs from syntheses of the interview sessions also formed part of the activities at this phase. To analyze open-ended interview responses, researchers use qualitative methods to code, organize information, and logically group data into categories or themes to increase the quality of research (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019).

I used NVivo, a qualitative analysis software, to identify themes from the literature review, interview, and document review process, with possible new information from member checking. Qualitative data analysis software enables efficient handling and management of large data sets, thereby relieving researchers of arduous tasks (Cypress, 2017). A labeling system allowed me to categorize themes for ease of cross-comparison to gain in-depth knowledge from the inquiry. I also generated manual data codes on

Microsoft Excel concurrently with the coding on NVivo and compared both systems' outcomes as a reliability check.

The third step of the analysis is to reassemble fragmented data into new groupings (Yin, 2016). Data reassembling involves creating meaningful clusters from componentized data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). I grouped sub-themes to establish a pattern using thematic analysis. The thematic analysis involves analyzing, synthesizing, and interpreting data on the same subject within a specific theme or number of themes (Ülger et al., 2020). Using Herzberg's two-factor theory as the viewing lens, I used thematic analysis to continuously check for newer insights by cross theme comparison and further review of additional literature until reaching data saturation, when ideas emerging from the process become repetitive. Data saturation occurs when researchers cannot obtain additional or new information (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). After the reassembling of data, I proceeded to the next stage.

The fourth and fifth steps of data analysis are interpretation and conclusion (Yin, 2016). Giving meaning to analyzed data is essential to making a conclusion and answering the central research question. However, Yin (2016) pointed out that researchers may sometimes need to restart the process from step one in interpreting outcomes of the data analysis. With due care, there was proper matching of themes at the reassembly stage of this study to avoid restarting the analysis from the beginning and losing time. I drew meaningful conclusions from the interpretation of data to end the analysis process. The whole essence of analyzing data was to establish an informed knowledge of the subject matter. I summarized findings and disseminated the same to participants via email. After updating my final study with new research relevant to the specific business problem, I presented findings with explanations to resolve any seeming conflict.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are fundamental criteria for assessing the quality of research (Johansson, 2019). Four essential components of reliable and valid qualitative research are dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Discussion of four essential components of qualitative research are under the headings of reliability and validity.

Reliability

Reliability in qualitative research refers to the dependability of data generated (Burkholder et al., 2020). Yin (2018) explained reliability as the consistency in the research method and outcomes. Therefore, ensuring that the repeated conduct of research results in consistent conclusions enhances reliability.

Dependability is the consistent outcome of research from facts that become evident from unbiased analysis and not personal intuitions (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Dependability is evidence of consistency in data collection, analysis, and reporting (Burkholder et al., 2020). To ensure reliability, I followed the guidelines in the interview protocol and ensured the use of only the data collected to drive the research. No personal bias and intuitions influenced the outcome of the study. Furthermore, an inquiry audit establishes dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, member checking was a veritable process for ensuring an independent review of my synthesis of participants’ responses.

Validity

Validity refers to confirmable conclusions based on methods used to address threats to the quality of research (FitzPatrick, 2019). Validity connotes the correctness of the findings derived from research without any bias (Kenny, 2019). There was provision of reasoning for all actions taken during this study by concisely outlining delimitations, challenges faced, and choices made.

Credibility of research refers to the transparent truth in the conduct of research (Mendes-Da-Silva, 2019). As the primary data collection instrument, the researcher is vital to the validity and credibility of qualitative research (Shufutinsky, 2020). In this study, there was no pre-empting of outcomes but deliberate effort to ensure and present data-driven findings. Input to data analysis derived from the compilation of data from multiple sources. Therefore, methodical triangulate yielded credible conclusions. Participants' verifying the accuracy of the record of their responses through member checking was also a means of ensuring the credibility of data analysis informing the research conclusions.

Confirmability relates to establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer's imagination but derived from the data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). An independent review of the research activities trail should indicate that the researcher did not influence the data (Amechi & Bush, 2019). To ensure confirmability, I provided precise details of the steps taken during the research and kept all data for the study for 5 years as valid evidence of work done. At the expiration of the

5 years, I will destroy all data in compliance with ethical considerations in conducting research. I did not let my personal bias impede or influence data analysis and conclusions from findings throughout the research process.

Transferability is the meaning users give to research findings based on available information and its applicability to specific contexts (Munthe-Kaas et al., 2020). Maintaining an audit trail of work done in research will enable users to decide on the study's relevance to their personal needs. A detailed description of all the phases of research, from data collection to findings, will enhance transferability. The decision to use a study clearly explained as conducted in the North is up to the user located in the south.

Data saturation occurs when researchers cannot obtain additional or new information (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). I achieved data saturation by aggregating all the themes evident from the literature review, interviews, member checking, reflective notes, public-facing documents, and probing newer themes until information became repetitive. I ensured rigor in the conduct of the study to enhance reliability and validity.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 of this study included an explanation of the purpose statement, the role of the researcher, and a detailed description of participants. Discussions covered research method and design, ethical consideration, data collection instruments and techniques, data organization, and analysis. Section 2 ended with explanations on reliability and validity. Section 3 includes an introduction, presentation of findings, applications to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for actions, issues for further research, personal reflections on the research process, and a conclusion.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore successful strategies that managers of retail organizations use to increase the retention of retail employees. The targeted population consisted of managers of three retail organizations in Michigan who successfully implemented strategies to increase retention of retail employees. Participants answered nine open-ended questions during semistructured interviews conducted in a quiet and secure environment. Each participant was labeled P1 to P3. After each interview, I performed member-checking along with methodical triangulation in relation to confirming data saturation, validity, and reliability of this study's findings. The findings of this study aligned with the literature review and the conceptual framework.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question of this research was "What successful strategies do managers of retail organizations use to increase the retention rate of retail employees?" To answer this question, I performed three semistructured interviews following all designated steps of the interview protocol. All participants met the required criteria of being employed as managers of retail organizations in Michigan, with a minimum age of 18 years, who successfully implemented employee retention strategies. Each participant recieved an IRB-approved invitation to participate and a consent form. All interviews were conducted in a quiet setting. After the interviews, transcription of the audio recording of the sessions took place, followed by scheduled member-checking with each participant to confirm the accuracy and validity of the data.

Following the member-checking process, I gathered all interview transcripts, member-checking summaries, and any organizational documents that pertained to the organization's hiring process for safekeeping. To ensure the accuracy of findings, I conducted data analysis both within NVivo and Excel to correlate results. Confirmation of data saturation became apparent when methodical triangulation of the three data sources used in this study gave rise to no newer themes. The codes and themes identified during data analysis were derived from the transcribed interview responses and acquired data from the literature reviewed on the chosen conceptual framework of Herzberg's two-factor- theory. Three themes were apparent: (a) COVID-19 and its impact on employee retention, (b) effective human resource management structure, and (c) adaptive leadership.

Theme 1: Covid-19's Impact on Employee Retention

All participants agreed that identifying and managing the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic is essential to crafting successful strategies for improving employee retention in the retail industry. Responses alluded to COVID-19 as one of the many historical markers that changed the landmark of business. The change in the retail industry due to Covid-19, as P2 observed, has caused retail organizations to re-evaluate their general outlook on how business is run concerning employee input. P3 specifically mentioned that "the pandemic has created a situation where companies look over their shoulders to see what competition is doing to cope with attending aftermaths." In essence, P1, P2, and P3 implied that times have changed after the COVID-19 pandemic, and businesses need to consider its implications in crafting successful strategies. Due to the COVID-19, there was a gradual reduction in retail organization profits due to rising costs of maintaining salaries of deposed employees and securing temporary stand-ins. The three participants were consistent in their assertions that with the progression of the pandemic, the situation degenerated into an inability to sustain personnel costs. Both P2 and P3 mentioned that competition now exists for organizations that have resources to try to acquire an employee of a competitor's organization. P2 shared a personal experience that they had to let some people go because they were shut down during the pandemic and faced with a dilemma of either allowing everybody to end up unemployed or get some sort of "paycheck protection program loan." P1 stated that:

> I feel like people used to be more willing to put up with a bad environment that is mentally draining, exhausting, and stressful environment than they are willing to put up with something like that right now because there are so many opportunities, and I just think that people aren't scared of change as much as they used to be.

P2 also noted that everyone needed to survive one way or the other, and this was not a question of loyalty to the business:

> I would say one of the challenges we face due to COVID-19 was employees having other opportunities and the fact that competitors were offering ridiculous wages to attract people and that made it tough to compete with the big companies that were offering more than the type of wages that, maybe, a smaller family-owned business could offer just due to its structure.

P3 echoed P2's sentiments by explaining that people no longer mind the nature of jobs they came across as long as it paid more than the current employer offered:

> With any job, everyone wants to increase their livelihood, and if it is hard to make a livable wage, you will have other companies offering so much more to move over to a new position. Also, since everything these days has increased in price, it is almost a sacrifice to work here.

There is a correlation between the significance of Covid-19 impacts on retention captured in Theme 1 and the literature. For example, researchers reported a notable shift from conventional to electronic transaction methods, with people tending to switch to online shopping through e-commerce sites as an aftermath of the pandemic (Aulawi et al., 2021). The digitization of services, transactions, and online shopping experienced exponential growth due to the nature of remote work derived from the impacts of COVID-19 and resulted in job insecurity or job loss in extreme cases (Aulawi et al., 2021). When employees perceive a threat to the sustenance of their salaries and other compensations for work done, or they become aware of the possibility of earning higher wages offered by a competing organization, which their current employer is unwilling or unable to pay, dissatisfaction becomes evident and may regressively crystallize into the hygiene situation described in the two-factor theory by Herzberg et al. (1959). However, it is possible to increase job satisfaction even if dissatisfaction is not reduced, and vice versa (Koziol & Koziol, 2020). If managers of retail organizations were to address the dissatisfaction triggered by the aftermath of the pandemic, there may be a reduced dissatisfaction capable of triggering employees’ desire to seek opportunities elsewhere, though it might not necessarily increase employee satisfaction. A well-prepared HR strategy and an action plan for its implementation may enable an organization to effectively manage individual processes to support its goals and respond flexibly to change (Vrchota & Řehoř, 2019).

Without the proper motivation strategies within the organization, a win-win situation for the organization and employees may not exist. When employees sharpen their skills and take on more responsibilities, they either look for promotions within the company or outside for better opportunities, assuring career progression (Stemmale & Hampton, 2020). An employee’s behavior may change over time when the surrounding conditions of the job change (Hyasat, 2022). For example, the Covid-19 pandemic increased employees’ sensitivity to issues of security, health, and work-life balance, and management strategic responses that address those heightened needs elicit favorable employee responses (Cao & Hamori, 2022).

Employee satisfaction and motivation levels are usually driven by how valuable employees perceive themselves to be in the organization, as displayed by strategies implemented by management in response to prevailing situations (Deuri et al., 2022). Employees who perceive their job role as directly contributing to the organizational role and experience job satisfaction have a higher likelihood of remaining in the organization (Kalgin et al., 2018). The work environment is a moderating factor in the relationship between compensation and employee retention (Bibi et al., 2017).

Remuneration for work done also has a significant relationship with employee retention (Bibi et al., 2017). Employee remuneration or compensation package is a crucial factor for consideration across the recruiting, engagement, and retention phases, and if the right package is not perceived as fair, either the best candidate will not be employed, an existing good employee will not be motivated, or the turnover rate begins to increase (Shtembari et al., 2022). Companies provide benefits to prove that they care for their employees' personal needs or because they wish to offer an attractive and competitive total compensation package (Galetić & Klindžić, 2020). For retail organizations, management's strategies reflecting a commitment to fair compensation and to stimulate performance in the drive for improved business earnings is a motivator for both current and prospective employees (Tuan & Rajagopal, 2019). Employees depend on compensation to maintain stability in their lives, while employers rely on employees' abilities and performance to maintain their competitiveness in the market (Kim & Jang, 2020). Hence, managing all aftermaths of COVID-19 that could create an imbalance in employee-employer expectations is critical to mitigating an adverse rate of employee turnover.

Theme 2: Effective Human Resource Management Structure

Participants established that having an effective HRM structure was necessary for coping with employee retention issues, and this point became prominent at different points during responses to the interview questions. The participants mentioned numerous issues that having an effective HRM structure could have identified and addressed. Some of these issues included work-life balance and the need for healthy employer-employee communication. A particular observation was that all participants indicated that their organizations initially had no formal employee retention policy, indicating a poor HRM structure. P2's specific response to the question of what strategies were in place to identify why some retail employees leave the company was that “I cannot say that there is any right now. They had not implemented anything that has improved the ability to overcome the challenge of retaining retail employees.” Given the situation of loss of talent and in their capacity as managers, P1, P2, and P3 commented that they had to self-initiate the creation and implementation of employee retention strategies that worked in their particular instances. P3 mentioned that:

> If your employees want something, and unless you are looking for a complete revolt and having your people quit, you eventually must cave to what your people want. So, the focus was really on understanding what the needs of the employees were, and I do not know if it was a need to be out of here by seven o'clock as much as I want to be home at seven o’clock, but I think it was more about if you want to keep good people you have to identify what people want.

One of the challenges that P2 and P3 opined could have been addressed if an effective HRM structure was in place was poor work-life balance, which was essential to their employees. Another issue mentioned was the need for flexibility and adaptability, treating their retention strategies more like fluid hygiene factors that are adjusted as needed. In addition, P1 pointed out that being able to create an atmosphere of open communication between management and employees on matters bothering motivation on the job was one of the significant hurdles overcome in his organization. P1 stated that:

> I can open myself up to anything that an employee wants or is confused about. This creates a positive environment, and it makes them feel very comfortable to be able to come to me when they need it.

Various sources discussed in the literature review are consistent with the second theme. The two-factor theory by Herzberg et al. (1959) is a structure for human resource management, and its effective implementation ensures a deliberate focus on heightening the satisfaction of employees and eliminating, as much as possible, factors resulting in dissatisfaction. The identification of triggers of employee motivation to either stay with the company or leave is essential for business leaders in crafting employee retention strategies. Herzberg et al. clarified that despite having identified triggers of either satisfaction or dissatisfaction factor categories, addressing what will enhance satisfaction may not necessarily eliminate dissatisfaction, and vice versa. Though efficient human resource practices may lower the level of employee intention to leave and increase employee retention levels, retaining competent employees to remain loyal to the organization is not always easy (Noranee et al., 2021). Hence, an effective HRM system should give separate attention to issues of satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

From the perspective of Herzberg's two-factor theory, work-life balance presents as one of the hygiene factors that relates to issues concerning dissatisfaction. Addressing dissatisfaction can be done by ensuring that employees achieve equilibrium by having time to pursue personal interests and recharge outside of work (Hämmig et al., 2009). Having a system of revolving strategies may give organizations the flexibility to change and adapt to fluctuating market conditions, while HR flexibility may contribute to employee performance (Sabuhari et al., 2020). The importance of maintaining a good team that functions together reflects competence, quality, and cohesion (Gendron et al., 2016). Effective communication works as a veritable human resource strategy for maintaining a bonded workforce (Gendron et al., 2016). Although human resources strategy can help remain competitive within the retail industry, poor communication and unwillingness to share information become obstacles to knowledge retention within organizations (Cox & Overbey, 2023). In addition, one of the main goals of human resources strategies is to increase performance and organizational productivity: the more resources an organization devotes to communicating its employee retention strategies, the higher the performance and productivity of the organization (Nafari & Rezaei, 2022). This openness in employee engagement in the workplace is crucial for firms (Martins et al., 2022).

An effective HRM structure on talent management that ensures the objective evaluation of employees on merits and the use of total compensation systems as both financial and non-financial reinforcements allows for a greater employee involvement environment and builds trust (Luna-Arocas et al., 2020). Career growth opportunities, advancement, and salary significantly determine employee retention, and these variables show that both motivators and hygiene factors are crucial to employee retention (Zubair, 2022). The position an employee attains in an organization serves as an objective measure of achievements through the time and effort invested in their careers (Myrtle et al., 2008). Hence, the absence of an effective HRM structure to address employee retention strategies may result in an emergence of causes of dissatisfaction or the erosion of work satisfaction, while its presence can start to motivate and drive employee performance. The good performance of employees provide reputation, prestige, brand value, awareness, quality, effectiveness, efficiency, and profitability (Damar et al., 2020).

Having a structure that strikes a balance between adaptability strategies promotes employee retention strategies and engendering growth, development plans, and a strong company culture (Garrido-Vega et al., 2023).

Theme 3: Adaptive Leadership

Responses from the three participants in this study indicated that their organization initially had no formal employee retention strategy in place. However, when the realities of possibly losing experienced employees became evident, they had to take the initiative to display leadership skills that prioritized motivator factors and, at the same time, addressed hygiene factors. The stance they took evolved into the organizational culture implemented in their respective organizations. Adaptive leadership was inherent in the various strategies they explained were adopted for successfully retaining employees. P1 and P3 mentioned having to affect the organization's culture by how they interpreted industry employee turnover trends and acted proactively rather than being reactive. P2 similarly mentioned “creating a scheduling system that works for every member of the team such that there is no conflict with the time they have for personal growth programs”. P3 pointed out that giving employees training, which their counterparts in competing retail organizations do not have access to, made the work environment more challenging and prevented inertia. The three participants stressed the aspect of employee recognition by rewarding or compensating for good performance on the job.

The participants mentioned creating a supporting work culture that ensures team members can openly share their problems or challenges, care about the well-being of one another, and express their aspirations without feeling stifled. In response to the question about what strategies have increased the retention of retail employees, P1 stated that:

> I mean, as far as strategy is concerned, that is something that all our managers and our team have spoken about before. I feel like other small things go into our environment that make people want to stay and work with us. I feel like the main strategy to get people to stay and be able to stay is to be able to learn and be super flexible with scheduling, and our entire management team is easy to approach.

P3 responded to the same question that his goal, as a manager of a retail organization, was offering competitive wages, time off, flexible schedules, and showing respect to employees while making the work environment where people want to stay. P2 mentioned again that given the increase in prices of almost everything, he recognized that "employees make a great deal of sacrifice to work here, and it is more the fact of loving what they do and being around the opportunity to have a flexible schedule". In other words, the participants used managerial levers such as scheduling, learning, and growth opportunities to address factors that could result in dissatisfaction for the employees.

Findings in sources reviewed in the literature align with the third theme. The motivator-hygiene theory underscores the factors that influence the satisfaction and dissatisfaction of employees (Herzberg et al., 1959). The theory lends to Theme 3 in the sense of the ability of management to leverage motivators to heighten the level of employee satisfaction and taking steps to mitigate factors capable of causing employee dissatisfaction. Leadership styles affect employee productivity, and adopting the correct style may enhance the possibility of reaching the maximum success of chosen employee retention strategies (Leidner et al., 2018). Hygiene factors/dissatisfiers, which include administration, company policy, supervision, job security, salary, interpersonal relations, status, and personal life, do not have any motivational value to employees when present but have a de-motivational effect if absent (Mgaiwa, 2023). For instance, a situation of inertia setting in when employees remaining on the same job for a long time develop the feeling of no longer gaining anything out of their current position (Harju & Hakanen, 2016). Such feelings of inertia may degenerate into dissatisfaction and lead to retention problems.

Employee turnover is a challenge that organizational managers face, resulting in business costs that include recruitment, training, and advertisement (Andrews & Mohammed, 2020). Proper management of performance, commitment, turnover, and employee satisfaction may improve organizational culture and increase employee retention (Harju & Hakanen, 2016). Most employees want to learn, develop, and increase their dedication to the firm, and the leader's role is to stimulate such potential (Tuan & Rajagopal, 2019). Such stimulation exemplifies an active stage of inclusive leadership, such that people become proactive and work towards achieving equity and equal opportunities while also extending their support towards people with marginalized or underrepresented backgrounds, identities, and experiences (Malik, 2023). Thus, the clarity and leadership created by a leader plays a vital part in the stimulation of employees' potential.

The adaptive leadership displayed by participants in this study is a mixture of situational and transformational styles. While a transformational leader leverages the self-interest of followers to achieve higher goals (Burns, 1978), situational leaders apply needed responses to their team members in different circumstances or contexts (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969). A leader helps members recognize their goals clearly and motivates them by stimulating and even encouraging self-leadership (Chang & Kim, 2022), If an adaptive leadership style copes with organizational changes imposed by the internal and external environments and influences the behavior of people within the system, such style has impacted the organizational culture. Organizational culture embodies the totality of values, beliefs, and perceptions that influence people's behavior within the system (Fok et al., 2021; Shumba et al., 2017). Culture shapes an organization's social and psychological environment and is an important aspect of a retail employee's working life (Fok et al., 2021). Culture is a prized asset an organization can possess that drives the right behavior (Warrick, 2017). An employee retention strategy for retail employees should factor in shared assumptions and practices that guide how members of the organizations think, act, and perceive their work environment (Fok et al., 2021). Business leaders that pay attention to working organizational culture experience influence employee retention (Shumba et al., 2017). Deductions made on the third theme extend the body of knowledge on retention strategies to retain retail employees.

Applications to Professional Practice

The findings of this study are valuable to business leaders, human resource managers, retail managers, and employees within the retail industry. The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore successful strategies that managers of retail organizations use to increase the retention of retail employees. I conducted three interviews with managers of retail organizations who met the requirement for participation set forth in this study. I identified three themes using Nvivo coding: COVID-19 and its impact on employee retention, effective human resource management, and adaptive leadership.

Many firms have been completely transformed, as the pandemic has taken many businesses down while at the same time giving rise to new ones (Alo et al., 2023). Employee retention strategies are important to the overall success and health of an organization and whether an organization survives phenomena such as the COVID-19 pandemic and uncertain times in future (Patil, 2022). When employees are satisfied and have a positive perception of the retention strategies of the company, they remain loyal to the organization and do not leave. Hence, retention strategies should address the overarching needs of an individual and should be formulated and implemented according to the industry and its requirements. If the management of retail organizations gives employee retention strategies the necessary attention, the managers of such retail organizations would not have to take on that responsibility themselves. A business phenomenon where top management does not recognize that a challenge exists with successful employee retention strategies and secondarily that the solution is currently being implemented by their employees can be seen as a failure of leadership. Individuals who fail initially to achieve an important occupational benchmark but are given an opportunity to reverse the failure are prone to ruminative thinking because they cannot mentally disengage from the failed goal (Schaubroeck et al., 2021). Leadership involves the actions, guidance, and behaviours displayed by an individual or a leader to influence others to achieve a common goal (Reed et al., 2019).

The actions of the retail managers who participated in this study can be classified as an act of individual innovation. Individual innovation begins with problem recognition and the generation of ideas or solutions, either novel or adopted (Scott, 1994). When the managers of retail organizations display individual innovation toward solving employee retention challenges, they become veritable assets as subject to their respective organizations in the discussion of how the organization may best resolve any employee retention challenges. Creativity and innovation consciousness, along with the behavior of employees, significantly influence the success of the organization (Ye et al., 2023). Leaders and HRMs within the retail industry should explore the tactics currently employed by the front-line managers of retail organizations with successful retention strategies. Maximizing the strategies currently employed by retail managers will not only be cost-effective but will help to build a greater culture within these organizations as the employees will feel appreciated and heard.

In contrast, the leaders and HRMs will find an increased understanding of how their employees feel toward their current organization and the performance of their leadership. The performance of the leadership role is strongly associated with the employees' perception of their organization (Mutonyi et al., 2022). The struggle by both business leaders and human resource managers to find and implement successful employee retention strategies is not isolated to just the retail industry. Therefore, the findings from this study may provide insight to various business leaders and human resource managers from multiple industries. Given that the findings of this study highlighted what must be considered an opportunity to improve employee retention strategies, this study provides value to human resource managers, retail industry leaders, retail managers, and retail employees alike.

Implications for Social Change

The implication for social change in this study includes increased awareness about the phenomenon of employee retention strategies and missed opportunities within the retail industry by organization leaders and human resource managers. When leaders of retail organizations identify opportunities for the enhancement of employee retention, there is more focus on specific challenges and crafting workable solutions become easier. As retail organizations tackle these challenges and increase their employee retention rates, more employees will have the ability to have longer tenure with their current employer. When employees increase their tenure with their employer, they earn compensation for a longer time, resulting in more taxes being paid to federal and local agencies. The more taxes local and federal agencies receive, the more service and assistance they can render to the population. Therefore, the findings from this study are not only advantageous and valuable for positive social change within the retail industry but also for communities where retail organizations operate.

Recommendations for Action

Retail organizations need to look to implement the following recommended actions based on the findings from this study. The recommendations for action by managers in retail organizations facing challenges with employee retention strategies are: (a) Investigative efforts, (b) Creation and Implementation of successful employee retention strategies, and (c) Evaluation, Adjustment, and Continuous Improvement. The first recommendation is to identify current and ongoing challenges within respective retail organizations to determine the exact scope of the employee retention challenges faced by each organization. Findings from this study demonstrate that consulting retail managers and employees in the creation and implementation of solutions to address the current challenges of employee retention strategies within the retail industry may result in enhanced success from employe retention strategies. This type of effort from leaders of retail organizations and HRM, when managed openly and transparently, should create a culture of shared responsibility for the creation and implementation of successful employee retention strategies within retail organizations.

The second recommendation is to start the creation and implementation phase. Findings from this study provides evidence that leaders and HRM within retail organizations should work hand in hand with their employees to implement successful employee retention strategies through a creation and implementation phase. Consequently, the successful creation and implementation of employee retention strategies using internal findings from managers of retail organizations may result in a decrease in attrition rates within the retail industry.

The third recommendation is that leaders and human resource managers within the retail industry constantly evaluate the effectiveness of their employee retention strategies. The findings from this study suggest that leaders of retail organizations should create a measurement process to assess a given strategy's effectiveness against the current on-site findings from the retail managers and future objectives of the retail organization's employee retention goals. Leaders and human resource managers in retail organizations should be proactive and plan for the eventuality of failure at the beginning of their employee retention strategy creation and implementation phase. The findings necessary to be proactive in this phase will be provided by the investigative efforts undertaken by leaders of retail organizations dedicated to increasing employee retention rates. The ability to create and implement successful employee retention strategies will allow constant evaluation, real-time adjustments, and continuous process improvement, increasing employee retention rates within the retail industry.

The findings of this study are predominantly applicable to leaders and HRM of retail organizations. However, there are other members of the retail industry such as (a) retail managers, (b) retail employees, (c) researchers exploring employee retention (d) retail industry stakeholders and (e) academia. I shared a summary of the findings with the participants. I will also explore such avenues as (a) public speaking events for business associations and (b) trade industry presentations such as NACS (National Association for Convenience Stores) so that business leaders both within the retail industry and outside the retail industry can have access to the complete study.

Recommendations for Further Research

The recommendations for further research are in two dimensions: geography and research sample size. While this study focused on retail managers within Michigan, a recommendation for future research would be to expand coverage beyond just one state in the United States. An expansion of the research geography may increase the generalizability of findings from this study to other geographical contexts within the

United States. The other recommendation is to address the sample size limitation of this study. By expanding the sample size beyond three in future research, there may be newer findings that extend the pool of knowledge on the issue of employee retention in the retail industry.

Reflections

My journey through this doctoral study has been nothing short of immense. I substantially increased my knowledge regarding employee retention strategies within the retail industry. Not only the process of performing the literature review but also the real-world interactions with the managers of retail organizations have substantially changed my perceived notion of the issue of employee retention within the retail industry. My preconceived bias when starting this study was that employees within the retail industry were employees in roles that were not meant to be long-term. These retail industry roles were viewed as temporary positions until starting a career. Therefore, my preconceived notion was that the impact of successful employee retention strategies may be nominal. However, through the completion of this study, I became painfully aware that there are individuals who view these roles within the retail industry as long-term positions, and knowing this has shown me the increasingly important value of successful employee retention strategies within the retail industry. Also, the value and impact that increasing the success of employee retention strategies can have, not only on a single organization but, correspondingly, the communities where those retail organizations operate.

Conclusion

In this multiple case study, I explored successful employee retention strategies that retail organizations use to increase the retention rates of retail employees. Three themes apparent in this study are: COVID-19's impact on employee retention, effective HRM structure, and adaptive leadership. Unanticipated disruptions sometimes arise that may have adverse impact on the profitability and financial capacity of the business, and by extension, the motivation of employees who are important to the operational viability. Without an effective organizational structure and an adaptive style of leadership, a poorly managed unplanned situation may create in an imbalance of motivator and hygiene factors and could result in avoidable labor turnover and a crippled business continuity. The findings in this study illuminate opportunities to increase the use of and implementation of successful employee retention strategies for leaders, human resource managers, and managers within the retail industry. The retail industry in the United States plays a pivotal role in employing and serving individuals from communities large and small. Retail organizations within the United States consciously making efforts towards increasing successful employee retention rates serve to make positive impact on the communities that they serve.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Steps of Initial Interview

1. Provide an introduction of the researcher to the participant.
2. Turn on the recording device.
3. Provide participants a copy of the rights and protections afforded to them as research participants.
4. Conduct interviews consisting of nine interview questions.
5. Allow for elaboration by the participant if offered at the end of each sentence, being mindful to keep the interview on track.
6. Repeat answers to participants
7. Thank participant for participation
8. Instruct participants on the next steps like member checking and assure them of the receipt of a copy of the study on completion.
9. Provide participant contact information for the researcher.
10. Stop recording.

Interview Questions

1. What Covid-19 related challenges did your organization face when trying to increase the retention rate of retail employees?
2. What other non-Covid-19 related challenges did your organization face regarding increasing the retention rates of retail personnel?
3. How did your organization overcome any challenges presented in implementing employee retention strategies?
4. What employee retention strategies implemented by your organization have increased the retention of retail employees?
5. How did your organization implement successful employee retention strategies for retail employees?
6. What key barriers did you encounter while implementing employee retention

strategies to retain retail employees?

7. What strategies are in place to identify reasons why some retail employees leave the company?
8. What employee retention strategies have you implemented that have failed to improve retail employees’ retention rates?
9. What additional information can you share regarding strategies used to increase the retention rate of retail employees?

Follow-up Member Checking Interview

As part of a transcript review process, you will receive a PDF document via email containing a summary of the interpretations of your statements. This document will show your answers to the interview questions, the researcher’s interpretation of your statements and a corresponding section to confirm or refute the accuracy of the interpretation of your responses. Each section containing a question will have a text box in which you are free to add any comments as to the misrepresentation of your responses. Please note that this is a vital step as the information you provide will be used to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings of this study. When you decide to participate, you agree to complete the transcript review process. For purposes of confidentiality and protection of privacy, you will only see the information that pertains to you as a participant. When you have completed the PDF document, you will email that document to me (sean.murphy@waldenu.edu), and you will receive an email receipt. If any sections are incomplete, I will return the document with notes stating which sections still require completion.

Appendix B: Invitation to Participants

[Date:]

[Name:]
[Address:]

Dear Potential Participant,

I am a Doctoral Student at Walden University researching retention strategies to retain retail employees. The title of my Study is Retention Strategies to Retain Retail Employees. In this instance, participation eligibility criteria will be managers of retail organizations in Michigan, with a minimum age of 18 years, who successfully implemented employee retention strategies. The Study will not contain participants' names, company names, or any proprietary data. Instead, codes, such as P1C1 representing Participant 1 from company 1, will serve as identifiers to protect your identity.

If you are interested and eligible, I have attached a Participant Consent Form for your review at this time. Prior to indicating your consent to participate in this study, you may ask any question regarding any aspect that is unclear to you. Depending on your preference, the face-to-face interviews may be in-person or virtual - by either SKYPE or Zoom Video Call. You are at liberty to choose the timing convenient to you and communicate the same to me via phone or email to schedule the session accordingly. I appreciate you taking the time to read this invitation and look forward to your voluntary participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Sean Murphy
Phone: X-XXX-XXX-XXXX
Email: sean.murphy@waldenu.edu